Anxiety and Urban Life in late Victorian and Edwardian Culture, 1880-1914

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Abstract

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The thesis investigates anxieties about urban life in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, and examines emotional responses to urbanisation, industrialisation and modernity at this high point of urban growth and rural-urban migration: one that marked Britain's decisive breakthrough to a largely and permanently urbanised society. During the period, earlier nineteenth-century tropes of the 'shock' of the city, and anxieties surrounding rapid early urbanisation and industrialisation, began to recede. But from the 1880s onwards, as life in industrial cities came to be regarded as the norm, new anxieties came to the fore: concerns that related to the very pervasiveness and inescapability of urban life. I argue that the historically unprecedented growth in the size of cities placed enormous strain upon conceptions of the individual in modern society: the impulse to conceive of mass urban society in the abstract was in constant tension with a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity of each individual.

The research utilises insights from the recent 'emotional turn' within the humanities, which is more sensitive to psychological factors in cultural practices and social processes; and brings this historiographical turn to bear on attitudes towards the city. An emotional approach enables both a deeper and subtler exploration of high cultural responses, and the extension of the range of sources and actors beyond 'ideas' and 'intellectuals'. The thesis integrates a wide range of sources: literature, art, the writings of urban planners and social commentators, medical writings, working-class autobiographical writing, and oral history transcripts. Such an approach reveals the common emotional impulses and shared structures of feeling behind a diverse range of responses to the urban environment, and provides a deeper understanding of contemporary emotional life. It thus illuminates the ways in which individuals, societies and culture react to the complexities of modernity, and provides insights into the relationship between social transformation and emotional experience.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Faculty of History's Degree Committee.

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Contents

Chapter One – Introduction

    This study investigates anxieties about urban life in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, examining emotional responses to urbanisation during this period of social and cultural transformation; one that marked Britain's decisive breakthrough to a largely and permanently urbanised society. Throughout the period, the urban growth and industrial and technological innovation of the Second Industrial Revolution continued apace; contemporaries frequently expressed a sense of living in a new age of transition, characterised by dynamism, speed, and the boundless energies of capitalism. Cities seemed to be over-spilling from their traditional boundaries at an unprecedented rate; suburban sprawl created a sense that cities were no longer isolated pockets amid a predominantly rural England, and modern life in industrial cities was increasingly seen to be an all-encompassing mode of experience.

    The period was a high point of both urban growth and rural-urban migration, which marked the end of a long process of rural depopulation. By the 1880s, Britain was the first predominantly urban society in the world, the first nation in human history to have experienced this scale of urbanisation. London was the largest city in the world by some distance, with almost five million inhabitants in 1881, rising to over seven million by 1911 – the size of Paris, New York, Tokyo, Beijing and Mexico City *combined.* By the end of the period, 35 per cent of the population lived in cities of 100,000 in inhabitants or more.[1] Within cities, the urban landscape seemed to be transforming at an ever-accelerating pace, as older slums were cleared and jerry-built suburbs expanded into the surrounding countryside; encompassing once-prosperous semi-rural residences, which, in turn, became sub-divided into housing for an expanding body of lower-middle-class commuters. Urban topography itself seemed to be characterised by an uneasy sense of ephemerality and provisionality. The sheer scale of the modern industrial city presented new emotional challenges, such as how to represent and conceive of a vast and essentially unknowable urban landscape. As earlier nineteenth-century tropes of the 'shock of the city' began to recede, and life in industrial cities came to be regarded as the norm, new anxieties came to the fore that related to the very pervasiveness and inescapability of urban life. The historically unprecedented growth in the size of cities placed enormous strain upon conceptions of the individual in modern society:

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[1] James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), pp.9 and 24.

the impulse to conceive of mass urban society in the abstract was in constant tension with a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity of each individual.

There is a deep ambivalence towards the city present in the thought of the period. Contemporaries celebrated the progress of the age, yet expressed a sense of grief for what had been lost in the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation, and they reacted against the ugliness of the city, the estrangement of society from its putative natural roots and the social problems posed by urban growth. The relentless pace of modern life in the industrial city, the density of urban settlement, and the speed of travel and communications in the age of the railway and the telegraph were all thought to be contributing to an increase in anxiety.[2] It was also believed that urban dwellers were required to make psychological adaptations in order to cope with the increase in nervous stimuli, resulting in a distinctive mode of urban perception.[3] This apparent crisis of urban experience coincided with a new and intensified cultural preoccupation with anxiety itself, which, in turn, conditioned the emotional terms in which urban life was portrayed. Novelists, social commentators and the medical profession alike diagnosed nervousness and nervous disorders as the characteristic conditions of modern life; the psychological toll exacted by the pace of social change.

The thesis investigates the distinctive experiences of urban life, and the emotional challenges they presented around the turn of the twentieth century. It explores how emotional attitudes towards the city interacted with concerns such as theories of degeneration engendered by the popularisation of social Darwinism, the perceived increase in nervous disorders, and rural nostalgia. It investigates how the existing emotional climate conditioned and interacted with attitudes towards urbanisation, and suggests that fear of the city was often a means of articulating wider anxieties, such as over health, social change and the pace of modern life. 'Anxiety' is used, in broad terms, as a lens through which to examine the interrelation of specific forms of anxiety that clustered around discourses of the city: the anxious diagnoses of social ills made by a range of social observers, their own anxieties about themselves, and their projection of these anxieties onto others. By examining emotions, as opposed strictly to 'ideas', it is hoped the research will cast a new light upon such concerns; an emotional perspective enables one to get closer to lived experience, which

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[2] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience,* vol. 3, *The Cultivation of Hatred* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), p.506-7.

[3] Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p.156.

encompasses somatic as well as cognitive dimensions. Indeed, visual metaphors and emotionally charged language can reveal almost visceral reactions to the city. Phrases often found in descriptions of cities and their inhabitants such as 'fetid effluvia', 'residuum', or 'twice-breathed air' seem to indicate real anxiety over the human condition and the difficulty of emotionally accepting the realities of urban life. The aim is to reflect critically on the ways in which emotions are psychologically and culturally constructed, viewing anxiety as part of a nexus of emotions including fear, shame and disgust, and to examine how anxiety is managed and regulated by cultural practices.

Whilst there is a huge body of secondary research on the social and economic effects of urbanisation and industrialisation in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, comparatively little has been written on what these changes meant to the people who experienced them, and the effects that social change had upon people's inner emotional lives. Academic neglect is, of course, not a sufficient justification for the value of research. Rather, the thesis reflects the recent 'emotional turn' within the humanities, which is more sensitive to psychological factors in cultural practices and social processes; and brings this historiographical turn to bear on attitudes towards the city. The thesis also engages with perspectives from the history of the senses in order to uncover corporeal experiences of the modern city. Historians of the senses emphasise that sense perception itself is culturally and historically conditioned: the ways in which we use our senses, and the ways we create, order and understand the sensory world, are shaped by social values and conventions. As Nicolas Kenny writes of the 'feel' of the city, 'bodily practices that appear inconsequential on the surface, the everyday sights, smells, and sounds of the industrial city reveal unsuspected texture to urban dwellers' relationship with the charged environment of urban modernity.'[4] The shared vocabulary of emotional and sensory perception – evident, for instance, in the dual meaning of words such as 'feeling' and 'touched' – reveals the conceptual slippage between forms of contact and forms of emotion; the borderline between feeling as a process of touching and feeling as a form of understanding. An emotional and sensorial approach draws attention to the ways in which late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes to cities were informed by structures of feeling, in which discourses of urban life became embodied within individuals, conditioning how they experienced and interpreted the urban environment.

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[4] Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiences of Urban Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p.12**.**

The emotional and sensorial turns provide a novel approach with which to re-examine contemporary attitudes towards urban life. Current historiographical opinion is based largely upon the straightforward reading of a relatively small set of intellectual responses to urbanisation: writers who took a somewhat Olympian view of the urban population, and whose claims to objective knowledge of the emotional condition of England were often based on a set of assumptions about social change; or, alternatively, authors whose sense of 'being at home' amid the energies and cosmopolitanism of urban life established a 'right to the city' and betokened a characteristically privileged imaginative experience of urban life. [5] Historians such as Andrew Lees and Bruce Coleman have identified a broad move from mid-century optimism about the future of the city to a growing pessimism from the 1880s.[6] More recently, Patrick Joyce has viewed attitudes towards the late Victorian city as characterized by 'profound contemporary anxieties about governance', and an increased emphasis on 'the city as illegible, mysterious and dangerous'.[7] Judith Walkowitz has interpreted the late Victorian city as a site of sexual anxieties and dangers, in which optimistic attitudes towards urban life became 'imaginatively overshadowed' by anxieties surrounding urban decline. For Walkowitz, the 'anxious mood' of the period 'was communicated through representations of London itself, particularly those involving political disorder, urban pathology, and physical degeneration.'[8] Richard Dennis has identified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'a widespread anti-urbanism in English-speaking society, a fear that the size, density and impersonality of big cities militated against civilized life'.[9] Cultural and intellectual histories of the city tend to view the period as characterized by anti-urban sentiment, and anxiety over the vast scale of the modern industrial city, its insatiable growth, chaotic fluidity and boundless, destructive energy. However, all these authors acknowledge that urban anxieties coexisted with, and were tempered by more positive or optimistic celebrations of urban life, in which fears mingled with perceptions of freedom, liberation, opportunity and excitement in the modern city. As Lynda Nead writes of late nineteenth-century representations of London as 'Victorian Babylon', 'attitudes towards the city were

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[5] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp.15-16.

[6] Lees, p,106; Bruce Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Law Book Co. of Australasia, 1973), pp.10 and 168.

[7] Patrick Joyce *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), pp.14 and 202.

[8] Walkowitz, p.25.

[9] Richard Dennis, 'Urbanizing Experiences' in Martin Hewitt (ed), *The Victorian World* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.243-4).

always ambivalent'.[10] Seth Koven has written in similar terms of the ambivalence of 'slumming' intellectuals towards the urban working classes: the spectacle of urban poverty provoked both repulsion and attraction (indeed, often, an attraction *of* repulsion), in which slum neighbourhoods both exemplified the worst failures of industrial capitalism, and provided opportunities for personal and sexual liberation.[11]

Fewer historians have systematically engaged with popular experiences of urban life, extending an analysis of the emotional complexity of urban experiences from elites (or, indeed, elite views of the urban working classes) to the working classes themselves. An approach informed by a focus on emotions enables both a deeper and subtler exploration of high cultural responses, and the extension of the range of sources and actors beyond 'ideas' and 'intellectuals'. A deeper understanding of experiences of urban life can be found not just by paying attention to explicit articulations of social analysis, but also by reading 'through' texts, which requires sensitivity to the emotional reactions embedded within them. The thesis integrates a wide range of sources: from literature and art to social commentary and social theory, cultural criticism, medical writings, the writings of urban planners, popular advertising, as well as autobiographies and personal diaries, correspondence and memoirs, in order to illuminate cultural and emotional responses to the city, and to provide new insights into contemporary emotional life.

In particular, the thesis uses working-class autobiographical writing, and oral history transcripts of interviews conducted by social historians in the 1970s and '80s, in order to examine working-class experiences of urban life, and to bring these experiences into dialogue with intellectual and literary discourses of the modern industrial city.[12] Working-class

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[10] Nead continues: 'Babylon was a paradoxical image for the nineteenth-century city. It not only represented the most magnificent imperial city of the ancient world, but also conjured up images of the mystical Babylon of the Apocalypse. It was a place that symbolised material wonder and tumultuous destruction: a city whose splendour was its downfall. […] the image of the straight new thoroughfare was permeated with the presence of the meandering alley; fast public transport was obstructed by the figure of the wandering, dreaming pedestrian; and the aesthetics of glass and iron were compromised by lath and plaster and crumbling old houses.' Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), p.3.

[11] Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Pres, 2006), pp.4-10 and 184-86.

[12] The thesis follows the definition of 'working class' outlined in Burnett, Vincent and Mayall's bibliography of working-class autobiography, which is loosely understood. Authors represent a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, occupations (skilled and unskilled) incomes and dwellings (from the poorest inhabitants of slum neighbourhoods to the materially comfortable lower-middle-class occupants of terraced houses); all are linked by authors' self-definition as 'working-class' or 'ordinary' in socio-economic terms at some point in their lives, and through a subjective sense of being 'other' to bourgeois values, beliefs and opportunities. John Burnett,

autobiographies are increasingly being used by historians to shed light upon a range of dimensions of working-class experience: most frequently, attitudes towards industrialisation, employment and child labour, but also upon subjectivity, intellectual life, and experiences of childhood, fatherhood and the family.[13] They have so far been little used to explore working-class experiences of urban life in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Indeed, autobiographies discussing life in the years 1880-1914 provide a particularly fertile source for examining emotions. In contrast with the autobiographies of earlier periods, which generally contain little emotional reflection or introspection, working-class autobiographers reflecting on life around the turn of the twentieth century were beginning to fully articulate their subjectivity and inner emotional life for the first time.[14]

Moreover, as Julie-Marie Strange writes of working-class autobiography: 'writing is a negotiation between experience, internal states and cultural forms that permit expression of those states. In this light, we have to consider that (even) cliché can be freighted with profound significance to the person deploying it'.[15] One such cultural form available to working-class autobiographers that facilitated and enabled emotional expression was intertextuality. The new texture of emotional expression in this period, it is suggested here, is due in part to autobiographers' familiarity with intellectual and literary tropes of the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation. Autobiographers writing their accounts towards the twentieth century possess a wider emotional vocabulary than those of earlier periods;

David Vincent and David Mayall, (eds), *The Autobiography of the Working Class: an annotated critical bibliography,* vols 1 and 2 (Brighton: Harvester, 1984).

[13] For example, Burnett (ed), *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Routledge, 1994), and *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Routledge, 1994); Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2013); Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2001); Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Meuthen, 1982).

[14] Studies of working-class autobiography from the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries by authors such as Griffin, Burnett and David Vincent emphasize the absence of emotional reflection in accounts of poverty, suffering, and events such as the death of children. Griffin writes that autobiographies are 'frustratingly incomplete' in this respect, whilst Burnett notes that 'one of the most remarkable characteristics in much of the writing is the uncomplaining acceptance of conditions of life and work which to the modern reader seem brutal, degrading and almost unimaginable'. He writes that autobiographers are generally not 'consciously discontented', and are characterized by 'patient resignation to the facts of life' rather than by a struggle to emotionally accept such conditions. Griffin, p.4; Burnett, *Useful Toil,* p.14.

[15] Strange, p.15.

moreover, this very vocabulary was entwined with a critique of the modern industrial city.[16] Their language of emotion is often that of Romanticism, and their understanding of urban life often the Romantic view of industrialisation as a dehumanising process of disenchantment.[17] By the late Victorian period, working-class autodidacts would have been immersed in intellectual critiques of the city made over the course of the nineteenth century in a wide range of discourses. Even relatively uneducated people would be familiar with tropes and motifs of the shock of the city – the green and pleasant land destroyed by dark, satanic mills. Autobiographers wrote their own experiences both into and against these wider narratives of social processes; at the same time, these literary discourses of urbanisation and industrialisation provided new emotional registers with which to interpret their own experiences of urban life.

Researching a wide range of sources enables common patterns of anxiety to be discerned; it is hoped that a varied range of both intellectual and popular attitudes can be reconciled by illuminating the common emotional impulses and shared structures of feeling behind a diverse range of responses. An approach informed by a focus on emotions, as opposed strictly to ideas or intellectual 'temperaments', enables sensitivity to ambivalence and contradiction in sources, and enables, too, a critical analysis of the functions of ambivalence. The thesis reads ambivalence not simply as a mixture of positive and negative, or 'optimistic' and 'anxious' attitudes, but as a coherent emotional position through which a wide range of historical actors articulated their awareness of living in changed times, in which regress to the putative certainties of the pre-industrial past was acknowledged to be an impossibility. Sensitivity to the emotional reactions embedded within texts enables the historian to uncover the ways in which historical actors experienced the complexities and contradictions of their age. Such an approach illuminates the ways in which individuals, societies and culture react to the complexities of modernity, and provides insights into the relationship between social

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[16] Whilst the partiality and retrospective perspective of autobiographical writing presents methodological liabilities for historians mining these sources for factual accuracy, the subjective nature of autobiographical recollection is of value when examining the *emotions* of authors. In this sense, the retrospective nature of autobiographical writing can make it a particularly valuable source: for those authors who wrote their accounts well into the twentieth century, their accounts were shaped by a new awareness of popular psychology and psychoanalytic vocabulary, which enabled them to reinterpret their experiences of life in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries through new emotional and psychological frameworks.

[17] I use 'Romantic', here, partly in a cultural-studies sense of the term, close to that of Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*: as a tradition rooted in a critique of the utilitarian and mechanistic values of industrialism; a sense that an increasingly urban and industrial society was threatening certain human values and qualities of living best embodied by both the arts, and the beauty and inspirations of nature. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780—1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), pp.39-46.

transformation and emotional experience.

The primary focus of the thesis is on ideas of the city in the abstract, though it will also consider experiences of the material locations of particular cities, areas and streets, and the ways in which each intersected with the other. Chapter two, in particular, will alternate between abstract representations of the city, and encounters with urban space at street level – moving between, in Michel de Certeau's formulation, 'panoptic' and 'synoptic' perspectives of the urban landscape.[18] As the thesis will argue, ideas about cities conditioned the ways in which individuals experienced urban space and interpreted their environments. Indeed, the interplay between representations of cities in the abstract, and lived experiences of urban space, was a recurring concern for novelists and social commentators who sought to elucidate the nature of modern urban life. Whilst, in the 1880s, literature that took urban life as its subject matter frequently focussed upon urban problems that were concentrated in specific and bounded areas of cities – visible, for example, in the trope of the East End of London as a voyage into the unknown, or in the slum novels of George Gissing and Arthur Morrison – increasingly, around the turn of the twentieth century, contemporary observers reflected upon the difficulty of conceiving of the modern city as a coherent whole. London, in particular, became the focus of a series of attempts to imaginatively represent the complexities and heterogeneity of the modern industrial city. Across a wide range of discourses, observers explicitly reflected upon the difficulties of forming a "picture", an "image", or an "idea" of London that could encompass the energies and diversity of the metropolis, and the patchwork of its distinct material locations, as a totality.

In this sense, lived experiences of cities themselves also influenced anxieties about "the city" in the abstract. As Judith Walkowitz writes of the bourgeois male flâneur, 'throughout the Victorian period, it had been the prerogative of privileged men to move speedily as urban explorers across the divided social spaces of the nineteenth-century city, to see the city whole, and thereby to construct their own identity in relation to that diversity.'[19] From the 1880s, however, the prevailing imaginary landscape of London became inflected with unease towards the labyrinthine complexities of the city, whose traditional geographical boundaries were perceived to be increasingly and dangerously transgressed. Observers 'expressed their unease by constructing a mental map of London marked by fragmentation, complexity, and

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[18] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p.124. See also Nead, p.62.
[19] Walkowitz, pp.10-11.

introspection, all of which imperilled the flâneur's ability to experience the city as a totalising whole.'[20] Yet, on the other hand, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries witnessed a series of attempts to "map" London in its entirety, both through the empirical efforts of statisticians and sociologists, and through literary and artistic techniques that sought to capture the "spirit" or "soul" of the metropolis, at once encompassing and unifying experiences of its seeming fragmentation. As chapter two will argue, the question of how to represent and conceive of London in the abstract was an emotional problem, which attempted to resolve anxieties about the "unknowability" of the city, and to impose a level of imaginative control upon a seemingly chaotic street-level view of the urban landscape.

Indeed, the dominant focus of the thesis is upon literature about London – though it will, at times, explore working-class experiences of other large cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as experiences of factory employment in smaller industrial centres such as Lancaster. Chapter four will examine technological innovation as a mode of experience that was held to link all industrial cities, whilst the sixth and final chapter will consider an idealised rural landscape in relation to the urban. In focussing primarily upon London, the thesis replicates the focus of late Victorian and Edwardian observers, who frequently used the metropolis as a lens through which to understand the nature of the modern industrial city itself. Earlier nineteenth-century writings about cities had tended to focus upon the rapid expansion of industrial 'shock cities' such as Manchester and Birmingham, which seemed to dramatise the problems (and possibilities) that would come to shape the cities of the immediate future. However, by the late nineteenth century, attention was refocused upon London as the archetypally 'modern' city, and the metropolis became the primary locus both of contemporary anxieties, and of literary and artistic experiments that sought to convey the excitement and dynamism of modern urban life. Moreover, London was frequently used as a figure for urbanisation in the abstract. The growth of London was thought to represent the future direction of other British cities – presenting all the distinctive features of urban life, simply in exaggerated form; social commentators and novelists moved seamlessly from descriptions of London to expositions of shared urban experiences at a national and even global level. As we will see in chapter two, for many observers, to understand London was to understand the condition of modernity itself.

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[20] Walkowitz, p, 39.

Theory and Methodology for the History of Emotions

Recent research in the History of Emotions provides numerous theoretical and methodological frameworks through which to explore fear and anxiety.[21] For example, Barbara Rosenwein writes that 'the needs of a newly industrialised society created the emotionology of the Victorian era', arguing that social and economic transformation drives concomitant transformation in the structure of emotion, as people adjusted to new economic imperatives and new modes of life and work.[22] Similarly, Peter Gay's psychoanalytic approach to history in *The Bourgeois Experience* focused on the psychic conflicts at the heart of cultural attitudes and individual experience. Gay wrote that contemporaries attributed the perceived increase of nervous disorders in society to the pressures of modern life in the industrial city, believing these 'attacks of nerves' to result from the adjustments that the late nineteenth century had imposed upon its populations.[23] He argued that the body's instinctual drives are essentially conservative, and that change, no matter how beneficial the progress of the age, exacted a psychological toll. He wrote that 'we have failed to take the measure of their experience, their reception of the economic, political, intellectual and social changes that so radically transformed their lives'.[24]

However, whilst the application of these various theoretical and methodological approaches to historical research may not necessarily be mutually exclusive, competing approaches often rest upon fundamentally different conceptions of emotion itself – whilst Gay employed insights from psychoanalysis, for example, Rosenwein draws on cognitive and social constructionist theories of emotion.[25] A psychoanalytic approach interprets emotions in terms

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[21] For example, Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006), Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal,* 55 (2003), William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review,* 107 (2002).

[22] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', *Passions in Context,* (2010), p.22.

[23] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud,* vol. 2, *The Tender Passion,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.330, and vol. 5, *Pleasure Wars* (London: Fontana Press, 1998), p.12.

[24] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience,* vol. 1, *Education of the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.9.

[25] Furthermore, historians of emotion often examine emotion in fundamentally different historical contexts. Whilst Gay's psychoanalytic approach to history focused on the emotional life of the individual, historians of emotion such William Reddy have sought to illuminate the *collective* experience of emotion through a focus on 'emotional regimes', which prescribe the dominant norms of emotional life for a given society or social group; the concept thus provides a means of exploring how social attitudes mediate individual emotional experience. Barbara Rosenwein, advocates a similar historical focus on 'emotional communities', in order to 'uncover systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as

of unconscious psychic conflicts, irrational drives, early childhood experiences, libidinal energies, and so on. Its model of emotional formation is essentially universal.[26] In the Freudian model, impulses can be repressed or sublimated, but they create constant psychic pressure unless given an outlet. The cognitive view of emotions, however, envisages emotions as part of a process of psychological perception, appraisal and production. Cognitive psychologists deny that emotions are inherently 'irrational', or that they are forces striving for release, instead viewing emotions as the result of judgements of "weal or woe": whether something is likely to be painful or pleasurable, harmful or beneficial, as perceived by the individual. Thus emotions are seen to have a universal element, in that everyone has the physical and psychological *capacity* to produce emotions; but the ways in which each individual's emotions are perceived, experienced and expressed differ according to social attitudes and cultural norms, as each society (and the individuals within them) produces differing assessments of "weal or woe".[27] A social constructionist approach emphasises still further the socially determined and relativistic nature of the emotions. Social constructionists tend not to be concerned with internal mechanisms of emotional production. The experience of emotion is seen to be entirely dependent on language, cultural attitudes, social practices and moral beliefs.[28]

The aim of the thesis is not to apply doctrinaire models of the emotions, or to view emotions as rigidly determined by social and economic structure, but to reflect critically on the ways in which emotions are psychologically and culturally constructed. The following sections consider three interlocking and interrelated aspects of the experience of emotion: emotions themselves, the language used to describe emotions, and ideas about emotion.

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valuable or harmful to them […] the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore […] and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.' Whilst Reddy's 'emotional regimes' and Rosenwein's 'emotional communities' examine the interaction between the individual's experience of emotion and collective social attitudes towards the expression of emotions, Peter and Carol Stearns have emphasised the need to distinguish between inner experience and outward expression. Their concept of 'emotionology' investigates the 'social factors that determine and delimit, either implicitly or explicitly, the manner in which emotions are expressed'. Such an approach entirely shifts the historical focus from the inner, emotional experience of individuals towards the 'professed values' of social groups and the 'collective emotional standards of a society'.
Reddy, p.129; Rosenwein, 'Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions', p.11; Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Streans, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 90, 4 (1985), p.813.

[26] In this reading, emotions are understood in terms of a 'hydraulic' model, in which emotions are likened to liquid forces moving within each person, perpetually needing to be let out. Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', p.834.

[27] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', pp.836-7.

[28] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', p.837.

Taken together, these considerations will guide the theoretical and methodological orientation of the thesis: the aim is to provide a working definition of emotion, delineate the focus on fear and anxiety, and present suggestions for how to read and interpret emotion from historical sources. This theoretical discussion is interwoven with a consideration of emotions in context, which indicates how these insights can be applied to anxiety and urban life in the late Victorian and Edwardian period.

Emotion

As we have seen, there is no straightforward, interdisciplinary consensus as to what emotions *are.* Emotion can refer to both psychological-biological states and cultural constructs, and encompasses somatic as well as cognitive dimensions. As William Reddy emphasises, there is no evidence for the concrete existence of discrete and clear-cut emotional states such as fear, anger or happiness at a biological level: 'both fear and anger, for example, [seem] to be associated with the same range of arousals of heart and skeletal muscles, and the same glandular secretions.'[29] Similarly, Joanna Bourke writes that 'the boundaries between fear and other emotions are not clear-cut. How does fear differ from dread, consternation or surprise? Anger, disgust, hatred and horror all contain elements of fear.'[30] Whilst Reddy and Bourke note the interconnection between fear, anxiety and their related negative emotions, fear and anxiety can similarly be connected to more positive emotions. Excitement often contains an element of anxiety; the two emotions can be experienced similarly by the individual. Fear, too, can be linked to pleasurable emotional states – accounting for the enjoyment, for example, of activities as diverse as skydiving and the watching of horror movies. Relating this to examples from the late Victorian and Edwardian period reveals the interconnection between seemingly diverse emotional responses to the city: one observer's excitement at walking through busy city streets becomes another observer's anxiety in the midst of the urban crowd.

If the boundaries between individual emotions are open and fluid, the boundaries between emotion, cognition and sensation are also not clear-cut. Take pain, for example: a physical sensation that is inextricably associated with a range of emotions, predominantly negative.

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[29] Reddy, p.12.
[30] Bourke, *Fear,* p.8.

Language commonly likens negative emotional states to physical pain – as in 'heartache'. At times, though, pain can itself be considered an emotional state – as in 'pained'. (And yet pain, understood as a solely physical sensation, can on occasion produce pleasurable emotions.) As Bourke writes in *The Story of Pain*, physical sensation cannot be separated from processes of psychological evaluation – pain itself is not so much a 'brute fact' of sense experience than a matter of 'interpretation'.[31] She emphasises that there is little scientific evidence for the 'myth of two pains', that is, 'emotional *versus* bodily pain': both are associated with similar levels of neurological activity.[32] Bourke's approach to pain provides a means of connecting the history of ideas to the history of the body and the lived experience of individuals. She writes: 'people perceive pain through the prism of the entirety of their lived experiences, including their sensual psychologies, emotional states, cognitive beliefs, and relational standing in various communities.'[33] Moreover, the body itself 'is never pure soma: it is configured in social, cognitive, and metaphorical worlds.'[34] An appropriate definition of emotion might therefore understand emotional states as processes or outcomes of mediation between mind and body, linking physical sensation to cognitive thought, and perception and appraisal to ideas, in a multilateral relationship. Thoughts influence emotions, and emotions influence thoughts, whilst emotions also influence somatic responses, and vice versa.

As Clifford Geertz has written of emotional life, the articulation of emotional states on an individual as well as a social level 'is a matter of giving specific, explicit, determinate form to the general, diffuse, ongoing flow of bodily sensation; of imposing upon the continual shifts in sentience to which we are inherently subject a recognizable, meaningful order, so that we may not only feel but know what we feel'.[35] Culture provides a cognitive dimension that is an inseparable part of all emotions – thus it is a factor both in generating emotional states, and determining their salience in the world. This thesis takes the view that all emotions are 'assemblages of components, and that such assemblages could vary almost infinitely'.[36] It views fear and anxiety as part of a nexus of emotions including shame and disgust, and examines how such emotions relate to social attitudes and cultural practices.

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[31] Bourke, *The Story of Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.4-7.
[32] Bourke, *The Story of Pain,* pp.12 and 21.
[33] Bourke, *The Story of Pain,* p.13.
[34] Bourke, *The Story of Pain,* p.17.
[35] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p.80.
[36] Reddy p.12.

Whilst many histories of emotion have been concerned with the identification of 'basic' emotions such as fear, in order to provide a base-line from which to examine processes of cultural construction, or with delineation of emotional states (as with examinations of fear *versus* anxiety), this thesis takes a different focus. It investigates urban anxiety as a cluster of emotions, in which ideas about cities and ways of perceiving the urban environment were literally embodied in individuals. Anxiety cannot be investigated separately from its related emotional states: fear, dread, shame, disgust, relief, excitement, anticipation, yearning, nostalgia, and so on. It is intimately connected to a range of psychological-biological states that lie somewhere between sensation and emotion: restlessness, hypervigilance, fatigue, enervation, nausea, and so on. Indeed, such an approach corresponds to late Victorian and Edwardian understanding of emotions. The concept of nervous disorders connected perception, cognition, emotion and the physical body. 'Nerves' conceptually connected mind with brain and body, whilst emotional disorders were understood to have somatic manifestations such as gastrointestinal problems, 'nervous headaches', and so on.

Martha Nussbaum's *Hiding from Humanity* also informs this approach. Nussbaum writes that shame and disgust are often associated with a desire to repudiate our animality and hide from humanity, arising from a sense of 'primitive shame […] at the very fact of human imperfection', and embodying an unrealistic and sometimes pathological wish to be invulnerable.[37] The unpleasant, visceral experience of bodily shame can be assuaged by externalising it, projecting shame outwards by transferring it into disgust for the Other (typically, subordinated social groups). This disgust is often inextricable from anxiety, as in social and moral panics. Such an approach can illuminate late Victorian and Edwardian responses to the city. Aspects of counter-degenerationist and counter-decadent discourse, in which emphasis was placed on the desirability of a toughened, hardened masculinity, perhaps reflect such a 'pathological wish to be invulnerable' and a fear of human sensitivity. Anxieties that urban and industrial society seemed inevitably to encourage physical and mental degeneration, softness, effeminacy and decadence may originate from such a sense of 'primitive shame'; certainly the language of degeneration was loaded with disgust.

The relationship between social change and emotional change is similarly complex. Whilst Peter Gay's psychoanalytic approach to the nineteenth century (which envisages the body's

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[37] Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006).

instinctual drives as essentially conservative) produces the assertion that social transformation inevitably exacted a psychological toll, this thesis considers that an examination of urban anxiety cannot proceed from a simplistic, monocausal understanding of emotional change. Recent neuroscientific and epigenetic research into the brain has emphasised its plasticity and adaptability. Moreover, perceptions and experiences of "change" themselves are extremely variable. Yet whilst brains themselves may be highly adaptable, cultural apparatuses are slower to adjust in the face of rapid social and technological change. It is highly possible that, for those late Victorian and Edwardian observers who experienced anxiety in the face of urbanisation, their emotional responses were shaped by the cultural inheritance of a less predominantly urban age, and its concomitant ideological and emotional conceptualisations of urban life.

Language, too, takes time to adapt to changed social conditions. Historians of the late Victorian and Edwardian city note the strain that urban growth placed upon linguistic strategies for representing the city. William Chapman Sharpe and Leonard Wallock write that contemporary observers felt themselves to be experiencing a 'crisis of language' in describing the modern city: they had 'run out of superlatives', their 'language itself [was] giving out on [them].'[38] Similarly, Nicholas Freeman writes that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed an attempt to develop 'a specialised language of urban life […] an attempt to articulate a condition of 'cityness' that seemed of urgent importance in an era of unprecedented metropolitan expansion.' [39] Historians of emotion note that the very articulation and expression of an emotion may influence its experience. Articulation draws upon available discourses as well as processes of 'feeling'; language participates in the creation of meaning. If naming one's fears helps to control and diminish the fear itself, then it is also possible that observers of the city would have experienced uncertainty, and perhaps anxiety, resulting from the lack of an established vocabulary with which to articulate the changes in their surroundings and experience.

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[38] William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 'From "Great Town" to "Nonplace Urban Realm": Reading the Modern City', in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (eds), *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art and Literature* (New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983), p.19.
[39] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.3.

The experience of emotion, and the language used to describe that experience, are inextricable, and engaged in a two-way relationship. This is not to claim that all experience is mediated by language – emotion has some form of existence on a pre-linguistic biological and psychological level. Yet language participates in the production of emotions; the very expression and articulation of an emotion influences its experience. The individual must name or label an emotion – to identify it as a distinctive occurrence – in order for it to be identified as a quality of experience. This act of naming, in turn, influences psychological perception and bodily responses.

To take a recent example from a review of Bourke's *The Story of Pain* by Gavin Francis (a medical doctor): Francis writes of being approached by a patient, who complained of a 'persistent, grumbling stomachache' that worsened after eating. Gastrointestinal disorders were ruled out; the cause of the pain was ultimately diagnosed as advanced, inoperable pancreatic cancer. Given this diagnosis, the patient's changed emotional state transformed his use of language, which itself influenced the experience of his own bodily sensations. 'Instead of a bellyache', Francis writes, 'he felt a "gnawing" deep in his guts: "It's eating at me," he said. His pain now had a meaning'.[40] New knowledge changes one's evaluation of a feeling, which in turn changes the feeling itself. The example illustrates the inextricability of emotion, experience, knowledge and language. Metaphors change and intermix. 'Grumbling' – for language accords the sensation of pain an agency of its own – changes to 'gnawing', as the patient's knowledge of his diagnosis creates a visual metaphor; the cancer metastasising, feeding, 'eating' at him as it grows. Moreover, the patient experiences his pain as migrating physically within his body, from the stomach to 'deep in his guts'. This change not only corresponds to the new knowledge that the pathology lies in his pancreas, and not in his stomach, but the migration is also in accordance with the force of symbolic language; 'gut' evoking a more visceral, psychologically central and emotionally deep-seated experience.

It illustrates, too, the metaphorical nature of emotional language. Beyond the simplest expression of emotional states – 'I am happy', 'I am sad', and so on – all emotional language could be said to be metaphor, insofar as it utilises material concepts from external reality in

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[40] Gavin Francis, 'How many speed bumps?', *London Review of Books,* vol. 36, 16 (21st August 2014), p.6.

order to articulate inner, mental states. Such metaphors 'map' the experience of emotion: emotional language typically entails metaphors of directionality, motion, force, growth and space. To take examples from late Victorian and Edwardian discourses of urbanisation and modernity, the city was frequently envisaged as a 'maelstrom', a 'vortex' or a 'whirlpool', in which 'all that is solid melts into air'.[41] Language accorded urbanisation an agency of its own – the city 'whirls' its helplessly passive inhabitants 'up and down',[42] or else rural dwellers are 'sucked' inexorably from the surrounding countryside into its 'abyss'. London could be envisaged as 'a huge dragon preying on mankind',[43] whilst the growth of its suburbs spread over the countryside 'like a disease',[44] a 'spreading sore',[45] or a 'malignant cancer spot spreading day by day'.[46] Such metaphors are more than just narrative devices and literary conventions. Metaphors shape the way we think and act; they are means for creating reality. The sociologist Michael Kimmel has written of the 'retrojection' of metaphor: a process by which metaphors, symbols and images 'come to be felt inside the body'. When figurative language is repeated time and again, it comes to be internalised within the individual; mind and body become infused with 'the imagery of cultural metaphors'.[47] Joanna Bourke, too, emphasises that metaphors have a profound impact on systems of feeling: 'metaphors enable people to move […] from inchoateness to concreteness. As such, metaphor is not simply an ornament of communication but, as cognitive scientist Raymond Gibbs observed, it is a "specific mental mapping that influences a good deal" about "how people think, reason, and imagine in everyday life."'[48]

Yet if metaphors shape perception and emotion, sense perception also informs cultural metaphors. There is an element of synaesthesia to the experience of emotion – evident in cultural clichés such as a 'blue mood'. In this way, emotions can be inferred from written sources (albeit carefully and cautiously) through examining visual and synaesthetic

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[41] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity,* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), pp.13-14.

[42] H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1909; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), p.77.

[43] J. Milner Fothergill, 'The effects of town life upon the human body, *National Review,* X (1887), quoted in Andrew, Lees *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.138.

[44] George Gissing, *Demos* (1886)*,* quoted in John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)**,** p.110.

[45] William Morris, 'Art and Socialism' (1884), quoted in Lees, p.179.

[46] Gissing, *Demos*, quoted in Carey p.111.

[47] Michael Kimmel, 'Properties of Cultural Embodiment: Lessons from the Anthropology of the Body', in Roselyn M. Frank, Rene Dirven, Tom Ziemke, and Enrique Bernardez (eds), *Body, Language and Mind,* vol.2, *Sociocultural Situatedness* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), pp.99-101.

[48] Bourke, *The Story of Pain,* p.21.

metaphors, and from sensual, even visceral descriptions of the author's surroundings. Emotional states can be discerned through the pathetic fallacy, in which authors externalise their emotional states by according agency to elements of external reality. Late Victorian autobiographers could find city streets to be 'coldly hostile' or perceive electric street lamps as 'angrily' glaring down upon them.[49] Such expressions are, of course, cultural and literary conventions, but this does not necessarily mean that they cease to be expressions of 'authentic' emotional perception. Rather, they reveal how culture can shape, colour and give form to the lived experience of individuals. Individuals are part of cultures of emotion, in which linguistic representation shapes perceptions of ontological presence. It might be a cultural cliché to describe cities as vortexes or whirlpools, but this does not preclude the possibility that such clichés literally came to be felt by individuals, who may have genuinely conceived of their experience in terms of the action of centripetal forces pressing upon their psyches.

Jonathan Rose has written of Edwardian mentalities:

> Complex systems of belief are based on very simple habits of mind […] A generation can reveal itself in the clichés it uses, and (to cite [Arthur] Lovejoy again) one of the most valuable investigative methods at the disposal of the intellectual historian is "philosophical semantics – a study of the sacred words and phrases of a period or a movement, with a view to a clearing up of their ambiguities, a listing of their various shades of meaning".[50]

Emotional attitudes can be discerned from these habits of mind. To take a basic example, cultural and linguistic convention commonly defines emotion in terms of directionality: happiness can be conceived as a 'high', people can feel 'up', whilst negative emotional states can be described as 'low', or feeling 'down.' Emotional value judgements can similarly be inferred from this hierarchy, as in the judgement implicit behind the terms 'high' and 'low' culture.

In the late Victorian and Edwardian discourse of the city, 'low' commonly refers to the slums, envisaged as both a social and topographical 'abyss'; to evolutionary decline amid the artificiality of city life; to decadents 'sunk' in urban luxuries and pleasures; to the 'mire' of fin de siècle civilisation, degenerated from a putative Golden Age; and so on. In this reading,

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[49] Robert Blatchford, *My Eighty Years* (Cassell and Company Ltd, London, 1931), p.71, and Edwin Muir, *The Story and The Fable: An Autobiography* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1940), p.105.
[50] Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), p.xii.

'high' refers to the lofty intellectual and spiritual spheres; to 'high-minded' social imperialists pursuing the vitality of the race and the future of empire; to an appreciation of beauty, the sublime, and the pleasures of the countryside. Focusing upon these shades of meaning, this binary of 'high' and 'low' reveals itself to be implicated in processes of boundary maintenance; it is most frequently associated with ideals of cleanliness. The discourse of degeneration referred to urban improvement as 'social hygiene'. One autobiographer wrote of walking through the slums of Glasgow:

> I often had the feeling, passing through Eglinton Street or Crown Street, that I was dangerously close to the ground, deep down in a place from which I might never be able to climb up again, while far above my head, inaccessibly, ran a fine, clean highroad[.] [...] the slums seemed to be everywhere around me, a great, spreading swamp into which I might sink forever.[51]

The pejorative downward terms conventionally used to refer to urban degeneration – mired, swamped, and so on – reveal a latent unease at the human condition, and a desire to symbolically escape the chaotic and fluid urban environment, and assuage urban anxieties, through linguistic strategies of boundary maintenance: to demarcate high from low, dirt from clean. The filth (both literal and metaphorical) of urban life is seen to dehumanise: urbanites 'pig together'[52] in 'hoggish slough';[53] London is 'the human dustbin' of the population.[54]

Yet equally in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, these symbolic binaries are emotionally implicated in alternative conceptualisations of the human condition and visions of the 'good life'. 'Low' also refers to a natural, holistic relationship with the earth, a society in touch with the soil, as in D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter's deployment of 'earthy' as a term of approval. 'High' often comes to mean artificial, detached: E. M. Forster's *Howards End* conveys a sense of the teetering precariousness of modern civilisation, as 'humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London.'[55] For Forster, high, too, denotes an unemotional intellectualism severed from organic life, as in 'the inner darkness in high places that comes with a commercial age.'[56] Humanity's upwards march conveys a sense of loss: for Charles Masterman urban society was 'divorced from nature and

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[51] Muir, p.107.
[52] William Morris, quoted in Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), p.16.
[53] Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), quoted in Carey, p.97.
[54] George Sale Reaney, quoted in Lees, p.110.
[55] E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910; London: Penguin, 1953), p.9.
[56] Forster, *Howards End,* p.309.

her ancient sanities'.[57] In a medicalised register, 'high' connotes a specifically urban mode of giddy, ungrounded, restless perception, as in the 'highly strung' nervous type.

At stake behind these various shades of meaning is a fundamental question about human nature: whether humanity is improved for repudiating animality in favour of urbane cultivation and refinement, or whether this sense of divorce between the rational and the animal entails the loss of what is truly human. Such questions have a long history in Western civilisation; they are embodied so deeply in language that they operate, often, at the level of implicit assumption and unconscious mental habit. But close attention to such habits of thought reveals the ways in which language, perception and emotion interact in shaping responses to the late Victorian and Edwardian city. Walter Houghton wrote in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* of the need for the historian of mentalities to examine ideas 'at the fundamental level below that of formal doctrine and schools of thought.'[58] Employing this approach, Jonathan Rose has read Edwardian culture for its linguistic clichés, revealing an Edwardian 'temperament' which illuminates diverse emotional attitudes towards urban life:

> a great many Edwardians developed a reconciling turn of mind. They fell into the general habit of eliminating conflicts – conflicts between ideas, individuals, and social classes – through neat synthesis of opposites… When we read Edwardian literature for its clichés, we discover that *divided, divorces, split, shattered, disintegration, dissolution,* and *in separate compartments* are the overworked pejoratives. *Unity, oneness, wholeness, bonds, synthesis, relation,* and *connection* are the cardinal virtues. The attitudes of an entire generation cannot be reduced to a slogan, but E. M. Forster's commandment "only connect" was a dominating theme in Edwardian thought.[59]

To return to the mental habit of directionality – of creating binaries of high and low – Rose writes that the 'synthesising' tendencies of Edwardian culture produced 'a kind of inner belief […] that the transcendent is immanent in the earthy, that to go down far enough is to go up.'[60]

The thesis follows this approach in examining the relationship between language and emotion, in order to illuminate the emotional attitudes that shaped (and were in turn shaped

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[57] C. F. G. Masterman, *In Peril of Change* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1905), p.xii.
[58] Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), p.xiii.
[59] Rose, p.3.
[60] Rose, p.13.

by) cultural responses to urbanisation. It examines the linguistic similarities and sympathies that lie behind often very disparate attitudes towards the city; the shared tropes and visual motifs used by observers of urban life. Common tropes and motifs reveal not just shared habits of thought, but structures of feeling: the common set of perceptions and values that limited contemporaries' sense of what was necessary, desirable and possible.

Ideas of Emotion

The following section examines two very different frameworks for interpreting emotion, or what might be understood as late Victorian and Edwardian meta-narratives of emotion: the medicalised discourse of nerves, and the cultural and literary mode of romanticism. Such master narratives shaped and conditioned the ways in which emotional states were interpreted, named and given concrete form, as well as the cultural meaning and personal significance that was accorded to the experience of emotion.

First, the medicalised discourse of nerves created pathologies of emotional experience, and was deployed most often in discussions of urban life. Late Victorians and Edwardians were intensely preoccupied with what they perceived to be the increase of nervous disorders in society, attributing these 'attacks of nerves' to the adjustments that the late nineteenth century had imposed upon its populations.[61] The American physician George M. Beard created the diagnosis of neurasthenia in 1880, writing that 'Modern nervousness is the cry of the system struggling with its environment'. The discourse of nerves had a wider cultural 'throw' beyond the medical profession: it became one of the defining idioms of the period, influencing social theorists and commentators, and was widely disseminated in the period's advertising, in which cures for 'nervousness' were used to market products such as patent medicines, health foods, and domestic groceries.[62] Peter Gay has written that late Victorians and Edwardians were not simply anxious – there was also widespread anxiety about nervousness itself. 'They worried over nervousness, which they took to be the archetypal

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[61] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud,* vol. 5, *Pleasure Wars* (London: Fontana Press, 1998, p.12.

[62] For further discussion of the wider cultural diffusion of medical understanding, see Chapter Two, 'The Language of Hurry'.

modern ailment, the malaise they deserved.'[63] The mental condition of nervousness, and its associated physical ailments such as nausea, indigestion, 'nervous headaches', physical weakness, and so on, were believed to be essentially caused by malfunctions of the body's telegraphic system.[64] Common cultural clichés indicate a basic form of medical materialism, describing nervousness and anxiety in terms of 'nerves all wrong', 'weak nerves', 'poisoned nerves', or 'deranged nerves'.

English observers followed German social theorists such as Max Nordau and Georg Simmel in their concern for the potential for nervous exhaustion in urban life. Nordau's *Degeneration* claimed that inventions wore down the nervous system, asserting that 'every line we read or write, every human face we see, every conversation we carry on, every scene we perceive through the window of the flying express' demanded an expenditure of nervous energy.[65] Simmel thought that urban life forced 'the nerves to make such violent responses, tears them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength', requiring individuals to make psychological adaptions in order to cope with the increase in nervous stimuli.[66] In English social commentary, comparable views can be found in *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England,* edited by Charles Masterman. One contributor, Reginald Bray, wrote that the urban milieu created confusion: 'A mass of impressions are hurled at the observer, a thousand scenes sweep by him; but there is nothing to hold them together, nothing to produce a sense of order, nothing to give a perception of similarity. All is bewilderingly different.'[67] This was held to create a perpetual sense of restless excitement, leading to nervous disorders and urban disorder alike.

In terms of the emotional psychology that was created by this discourse, the concept of 'nerves' might be interpreted as a kind of 'anti-romanticism': its account of emotional production is materialist and mechanistic, and tends to remove aesthetic and spiritual significance from emotional experience – in particular the negative emotional states of

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[63] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience,* vol. 1, *Education of the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.459.
[64] Takahiro Ueyama, *Health in the Marketplace: Professionalism, Therapeutic Desires, and Medical Commodification in Late Victorian London* (Palo Alto, California: The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 2010), p.130.
[65] Max Nordau, *Degeneration,* (1895), quoted in Matthew Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999), p.82.
[66] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), quoted in Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (eds), *The fin de siècle: a reader in cultural history c.1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.64.
[67] Reginald Bray, 'Children of the Town', in C. F. G. Masterman (ed), *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p.119.

anxiety and nervousness. Romanticism, on the other hand, valorised and aestheticised emotional experience. Its account of the nature of emotions was idealist, and endowed emotional experience with personal and spiritual significance. Rather than pathologising intense emotional experiences such as high levels of anxiety, romanticism envisaged emotional intensity as transcending everyday experience, and elevating individuals from the circumscribed material horizons, and the mundane and profane realities of urban life – as in the discourse of the sublime. Throughout the period, there was a widespread popular appetite among urban and suburban dwellers for romantic literature that celebrated the pleasures of the countryside: evident, for example, in the enormous popular readership of romantic poetry and nature writers such as Edward Thomas and Richard Jefferies.[68]

Romantic accounts of the city tended to focus on the deadening and dehumanising elements of urban life. William Morris, for example, believed that the ugliness of the urban environment and the economic rationality of capitalism militated against men's finer feelings, and their appreciation of beauty.[69] A sense of spirituality and an apprehension of the sublime were seen to be possible only amidst the beauty of nature. Significantly, these two seemingly incompatible metanarratives of emotion coexisted side by side, often being utilised and expressed by the same author. Whilst Masterman's *Heart of the Empire* indicted urban life in terms of the mechanistic action of the urban environment upon the nervous system, its underlying conception of country versus city was essentially romantic. It is haunted by nostalgia for modes of rural life felt to be lost in an age of urban growth: the green and pleasant land destroyed by dark, satanic mills. Masterman wrote of the 'New Town Type':

> physically, mentally, and spiritually different from the type characteristic of Englishmen during the past two hundred years. The physical change is the result of the city up-bringing in twice-breathed air in the crowed quarters of the labouring classes. This as a substitute for the spacious places of the old, silent life of England; close to the ground, vibrating to the lengthy, unhurried processes of Nature […] the spiritual world, whether in Nature, in Art, or in definite Religion, has vanished, and the curtain of the horizon has descended round the material things and the pitiful duration of human life. In former time in England […] the things of the earth were shot with spiritual significance.[70]

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[68] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The suburbs in fiction and culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 6-12 and 60-3; for further discussion of the popular appetite for nature writing and romanticism, see Chapter 6, 'The Cleansing of England'.
[69] Lees, p.179.
[70] C. F. G. Masterman, 'Realities at Home', in *The Heart of the Empire,* p.8.

Taken together, the two discourses of nerves and romanticism thus produced a distinctively late Victorian and Edwardian structure of feeling. Whilst urban sense experience tended to be interpreted in terms of a medicalised register, and sense perception was divested of cultural meaning and personal significance in the formulation 'nervous stimuli', sense experience of nature was envisaged in terms of a romantic sensuousness that was identified with the aesthetic and the spiritual. Divorced from such a system of meaning, the apparent variety of sensual stimuli in the city was often conceived of as ungrounded, and essentially meaningless. H. G. Wells wrote of shopping crowds on Oxford Street:

> This rich and abundant and ultimately aimless life, this tremendous spawning and proliferation of uneventful humanity! These individual lives signified no doubt enormously to the individuals, but did all the shining, reflecting, changing existence that went by like bubbles in a stream, signify collectively anything more than the […] confusion of shoaling mackerel?[71]

Such views indicate, too, the difficulty of emotionally accepting the flux, chaos and disorder inherent in modern urban life, and the emotional challenge of recovering a sense of individuality and human diversity amidst the density of settlement and the vast scale of the modern city. They evoke a sense of loss at the disappearance of the acuteness of meaning of individual lives in mass society, suggesting that urban and demographic growth strained emotional ideologies of the individual, inherited from an earlier age.

Implicit in the late Victorian and Edwardian discourse of the city is a structure of feeling that yearned to encompass sensual experience in a unified system of meaning: a structure which connected sense perception, the emotions, and an apprehension of the spiritual and sublime. Yet an examination of the ideologies behind this discourse reveals the degree to which ideas about emotion shape and condition the experience of emotion itself. Both 'nerves' and 'romanticism' entail cultural processes by which individuals are taught how to feel, and how to perceive and evaluate their environment. Individuals perhaps *learnt*, through immersion in the dominant discourses of the age, to perceive themselves as becoming exhausted by nervous stimuli in cities – to register 'every human face we see', every 'scene we perceive through the window of the flying express'.[72] Conversely, as cultural convention

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[71] H. G. Wells, *Marriage* (1912), quoted in Carey, p.150.
[72] Indeed, Wolfgang Schivelbusch has written of the cultural process of learning to perceive the altered experience of time and space during the railway journey over the course of the nineteenth century. Whilst the

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typically associated the countryside with stability, peace and stillness, individuals learnt to experience nature in precisely those terms. It would have been 'unthinkable' for contemporaries to linguistically represent, and thus experience, nature in terms of the mechanistic reception of nervous stimuli. Similarly, it would have been 'unsayable' for social commentators such as Nordau or Bray to describe a walk in the countryside in the same terms as walking through city streets: hypothetically, "every cloud, every tree or flower we see, every rustling leaf, or the torrent of water in a stream we perceive flying past" would not be deemed to demand an expenditure of nervous energy analogous to the apprehension of urban crowds and the variety of the built environment. Ideas about emotion taught contemporaries ways of seeing and ways of sensing, and connected these perceptions to systems of meaning and visions of the 'good life', which shaped and conditioned the ways in which they interpreted and experienced the urban environment.

Gender, Emotion and the City

Both the social construction of emotions and the experience of emotion also intersect with ideas about gender. The following section considers the ways in which both discourses of urban anxiety, and lived experiences of the urban environment, were shaped by considerations of gender and sexual difference.

In the late Victorian and Edwardian period, the pathology of anxiety itself was deeply gendered. Whilst anxiety continued to be identified with female biology in the diagnosis of hysteria, 'neurasthenia' emerged as a term that at once encompassed men's symptoms of anxiety, and diagnosed anxiety as a systemic response to the strains of modern urban life. Popularised by the American physician George M. Beard in the 1880s, neurasthenia was held to be the result of "overcivilisation" – the product of industrialisation, technological innovation, and the pressures of overwork in an increasingly competitive urban and

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cultural and psychological experience of the railway journey had become somewhat normalised by the end of the nineteenth century, the motor car perhaps ushered in the Edwardian era's emotional problematisation of travelling at speed. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The railway journey: the industrialisation of time and space in the nineteenth century* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986). For further discussion of late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards the motor car, see Chapter 4, 'Paleotechnic and Neotechnic'.

commercial society.[73] On the one hand, as Janet Oppenheim and John Tosh have argued, this identification of nervousness with overwork had the effect of partially ameliorating the feminised connotations of anxiety, by keying into the Victorian valorisation of the work ethic as a man's moral duty. The work ethic 'conferred a certain dignity on breakdown from "overwork," a condition of passivity and dependence that would otherwise have placed the victim's manhood in question.'[74] On the other, nervousness increasingly became identified with degeneration in fin-de-siècle debates about the future of civilisation, in which anxiety was envisaged as a weakness that threatened masculine self-control – and, ultimately, the fitness of the 'imperial race'. In this context, as Peter Gay wrote, nervousness could appear as 'a failure of nerve, a menacing effeminacy' that could only be alleviated 'by strenuous sports, cold showers, and the vigorous reassertion of male superiority.'[75]

Discourses of urban anxiety were deeply connected to anxieties about masculinity. The fin de siècle has commonly been seen as a period of 'crisis in masculinity', in which a combination of economic uncertainty, imperial competition, and the increasing power and prominence of women in the public sphere occasioned a sense of threat to traditional sources of masculine authority, and prompted calls for a 'stiffening of masculine resolve'.[76] The growing independence of young single women (symbolised by the New Woman), social purity campaigns, and the suffrage movement openly challenged patriarchy in the public sphere. Cultural representations of sexual difference in the period became fraught with fears of manly decline in the face of female power.[77] Such anxieties about masculinity converged in urban space: the discourse of degeneration identified weakness and decline with effeminacy, in which the enervating effects of urban civilisation were held to threaten the robust manliness required of an imperial race. These fears were intensified in the early years of the twentieth century, following a national panic over the fitness of army recruits during

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[73] Michael Kimmel, 'Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832–1920', in Michael Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p.52.

[74] John Tosh, 'Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914', *Journal of British Studies,* 44, 2 (2005), p.333; Janet Oppenheim, *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.152-7.

[75] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud,* vol.2, *The Tender Passion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)*,* p.337.

[76] John Tosh, 'Middle-class masculinities in the era of the women's suffrage movement, 1860-1914', pp.116-9, and 'Manliness, masculinities and the New Imperialism, 1880-1900', p.200**,** in John Tosh, *Manliness and masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on Gender and Empire* (Edinburgh: Pearsons Education Limited, 2005).

[77] Tosh, 'Middle-class masculinities', p.118; Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), esp. p.83.

the Boer War, in which up to two thirds of recruits from industrial cities such as Manchester had been declared physically unfit for service. [78] Edwardian anxieties about 'national efficiency' and 'the decline of the race' focussed upon the un-manly bodies of the urban poor, in which the language of imperialism and the language of masculinity converged. For John Tosh, anxieties about masculinity and the future of empire were mutually reinforcing. The heightened awareness of both opportunities and threats overseas induced a harsher definition of masculinity at home; at the same time, anxieties about changing patterns of gender relations in British society were 'displaced on to the empire.'[79]

Elaine Showalter has characterised period around the fin de siècle as one of 'sexual anarchy', in which the redefinition of gender roles provoked fears that sexual difference itself was becoming dangerously blurred. She argues that late Victorian and Edwardian culture sought to assuage generalised and diffuse fears about social change by shoring up the symbolic borderlines of sexual difference.[80] Cities seemed to be dangerously liminal places, in which the boundaries between male and female gender roles were being increasingly transgressed. The women's movement and the figure of the New Woman were redefining traditional meanings of femininity, and deliberately claiming urban spaces, traditions of protest and new freedoms, while male aesthetes, decadents, and the increasingly culturally visible figure of the homosexual suggested that the modern city threatened traditional definitions of masculinity. Judith Walkowitz has similarly emphasised anxieties about the liminality of the modern city. She argues that narratives of sexual danger emerged in London from the 1880s against a cultural background of media scandals about sexual deviance (such as W. T. Stead's 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'), social purity campaigns, and a proliferation of new sexual categories and identities; 'in these discussions, gender transgression and sexual transgression continually overlapped.' [81] For Walkowitz, these narratives of sexual danger went far beyond a concern for "dangerous" sexual practices, and became part of the negotiation of everyday life in the city: 'dangerous sexualities had as much to do with work, life-style, reproductive strategies, fashion and self-display, and nonfamilial attachments of urban men and women.'[82]

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[78] G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p.60.
[79] Tosh, 'Manliness, masculinities and the New Imperialism', pp.192-4.
[80] Showalter, pp.2-10.
[81] Walkowitz, pp.6-7.
[82] Walkowitz, p.6.

Indeed, lived experiences of the urban environment were also shaped, to a great extent, by gendered (and class) expectations. As Deborah Parsons writes, 'the city has been habitually conceived as a male space, in which women are either repressed or disobedient marginal presences.'[83] The task of understanding the nature of the city has historically been envisaged as a male enterprise: Richard Sennett notes, for instance, that cosmopolitanism, 'the experience of diversity in the city as opposed to a relatively confined localism,' was a distinctly bourgeois male pleasure. It established a 'right to the city'; a sense of 'being at home' amid urban energies, betokening privilege and possession.[84] It was the male flâneur's right to stride confidently and assertively through the city, at once blending in to the crowd and remaining aloof from it, in order to observe and master the intricacies of urban space. Of course, as the thesis will argue, experiences in reality could diverge considerably from this masculine ideal: male observers frequently wrote of their bewilderment in the face of urban energies, and expressed a worrying sense of alienation from the urban crowd. In the face of expectations that men should continually be "at home" in the urban environment, presenting their most confident selves in the public sphere, anxieties about complexities of the city and fears of the loss of self-control could be intensified, suggestive of a failure of masculine authority.

The gendering of the urban environment also deeply conditioned women's experience of the city. As Walkowitz writes, 'in public, women were presumed to be both endangered and a source of danger to those men who congregated in the streets. In the mental map of urban spectators, they lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning.'[85] Deborah Nord has written similarly of the 'impossibility of the *flâneuse* or female spectator.' As we will see in chapter two, whilst the male flâneur could observe urban crowds without himself being seen, female observers contended with their own status as spectacle. Moreover, women walking city streets could become associated symbolically with that other urban streetwalker – the 'fallen woman'.[86] Indeed, such confusion could be literal as well as symbolic. Gillian Sutherland writes that, as women's freedom of independent movement in the city (and particularly in London) began to increase in the late nineteenth and

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[83] Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.2. See also Parsons, pp.2-16.
[84] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.135-7; see also Walkowitz, p.16.
[85] Walkowitz, p.21.
[86] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp.12-13.

early twentieth centuries, the urban environment remained a 'contested' terrain, in which navigating the boundaries between new opportunities and traditional constraints was by no means straightforward. Middle-class ladies 'had still to be self-conscious about their behaviour in public places and to know where one could and could not go – and at what times – unaccompanied.'[87] Sutherland cites the experiences in the 1880s of both the novelist Olive Schreiner, and a milliner by the name of Elizabeth Cass, who were accosted by policemen for streetwalking whilst walking alone at night, in illustrating how contentious were the boundaries of 'respectable' behaviour.[88]

Focussing on women writers of the late Victorian city such as Schreiner and Amy Levy, Nord argues that consciousness of their own marginality and transgression in urban space created a 'particular vision of the female observer'; 'they re-wrote London out of a new relationship to its dangers, fascinations and pleasures.'[89] Chapter two will engage further with this historiography, yet it also brings it into dialogue with working-class women's experiences and representations of the city. The accounts of female working-class autobiographers are suggestive of a mode of urban spectatorship unaffected by the sense of transgression and vulnerability that constrained middle-class women observers of urban life.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two examines anxieties surrounding the speed and accelerated pace of the modern city, and concerns for the over-excitement of urban inhabitants resulting from the increase in nervous stimuli. It relates these fears to contemporary debates over degeneration and the perceived increase of nervous disorders such as hysteria and neurasthenia in society. The chapter considers, too, the problems of representing the modern city in all its vastness and heterogeneity, and the attempts of writers and artists to create a specialised language of urban life; to articulate a condition of 'cityness' that seemed of urgent importance in an era of unprecedented metropolitan expansion. It also examines more positive assessments of the city, in which the rapidity and dynamism of the modern city was a source of excitement and a cause for aesthetic celebration. In doing so, it considers the limits to aestheticising the

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[87] Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.76-7.
[88] Sutherland, pp.78-9.
[89] Nord, pp.12-13.

Victorian and Edwardian city: the ambivalence articulated by urban critics in reconciling the beauty of the metropolis with the pervasiveness of poverty and industrial toil.

Chapter three explores the contemporary ambivalence towards progress and modernity in discourses of urban life. Anxieties surrounding urban hurry and speed coexisted not just with rapture and excitement at the modern city, and faith in industrial progress, but also with cultural despair, and assessments of modern society as characterised by stagnation, somnolence, lethargy, and a pervasive sense of unreality. Despite the apparent urban improvements, and social and economic progress of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, cultural responses to the modern city displayed a seemingly paradoxical sense of malaise. In particular, the chapter examines how working-class autobiographers wrote their life stories both into and against wider historical narratives of progress and decay. It argues that the romantic critique of industrialisation provided a register in which autobiographers could narrate their life stories in terms of wider historical processes.

Chapter four examines paradoxical and contradictory attitudes towards technological progress, which simultaneously offered the promise of a solution to urban fears, and was itself productive of anxieties. Cultural histories of the late Victorian and Edwardian period have tended to emphasise technophobia in intellectual and literary high culture, and the predominance of anxiety towards machinery in the romantic critique of the modern industrial city; more positive or technophilic accounts are generally restricted to studies of artistic and literary modernism. The chapter argues for a re-evaluation of contemporary attitudes by drawing a distinction between old and new technologies, and between technologies as material artefacts and technology-in-use.

Chapter five considers anxieties relating to the monotony and uniformity of life in the modern industrial city, in which the aesthetic merged with the social: the fear of social commentators that the urban landscape exerted a deadening and dehumanising effect on urban inhabitants, whose monotonously mechanical lives reflected the surroundings in which they lived. Such attitudes indicate a pervasive tone of misanthropy in the writings of novelists and social commentators, which frequently configured the urban 'crowd' or 'mass' in abstracted and dehumanising metaphors. Yet this coincided, paradoxically, with a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity and complex emotional lives of each individual within the urban 'crowd'. It is argued that such tensions indicate the difficulty of

psychologically accepting the flux, chaos and disorder inherent in modern urban life, and the emotional challenge of recovering a sense of individuality and human diversity amidst the density of settlement and the vast scale of the modern city.

The sixth and final chapter examines rural nostalgia and pastoralism in relation to emotional responses to the modern city. It is argued that, whilst contemporaries indicted the modern urban landscape for its ugliness and indifference to the essential human need for beauty, there was a widespread recognition that city was also the site of cultural and imaginative resources which could compensate for the loss of access to the beauty and inspirations of nature. The chapter also investigates attitudes towards pollution and cleanliness in the modern city, and suggests that rural nostalgia and pastoralism were connected to ideals of cleanliness that were felt to be threatened in the modern city; ideals that both reflected the concrete realities of urban life and were deeply emotional. Whilst urban sensory experience tended to be conveyed in terms of revulsion from the unpleasant 'feel' of urban grime and pollution, sensory experience of nature was written in a register of assimilation and absorption, in which people are literally 'in touch' with the earth. The chapter engages with insights from the history of the senses in order to interrogate the conceptual slippage between processes of touching and feeling: the fault line between feeling as a form of contact and a form of emotion.

Chapter Two – 'The Language of Hurry': Speed, Nerves and Anxiety in Urban Life

On one aspect of urban life, late Victorians and Edwardians were in universal agreement: the modern industrial city spoke 'the language of hurry'.[1] Whether this was a cause for anxiety or a source of celebration, the idea that the urban present was simply *faster* than the past was an unchallenged commonplace in contemporary thought. The following chapter considers anxieties surrounding the speed and accelerated pace of the modern city, and concerns for the over-excitement of urban inhabitants resulting from the increase in nervous stimuli. It relates these fears to contemporary debates over degeneration and the perceived increase of nervous disorders such as hysteria and neurasthenia in society. Yet it also considers more positive assessments of the city, in which the speed, energy and dynamism of the modern city was a cause for celebration and a source of excitement. Whilst the period has often been read as one in which pessimistic attitudes towards the city were reasserted, and anxious assessments of urban life predominated, the chapter argues that attitudes towards the city are better characterised in terms of an intensified ambivalence. The very acceptance of mass urban life as the 'norm' enabled new anxieties to come to the fore that centred on the all-encompassing nature of urban experience.

By the late nineteenth century, cities were growing at an unprecedented and ever-increasing rate, both in terms of population and geographical boundaries. Suburban sprawl generated an image of cities as spreading cancerously into the surrounding countryside, careless of the destruction that urban growth caused to older ways of life. Within cities, life seemed to be moving at an even faster pace: forms of travel and communication such as the railway and the telegraph were held to have warped and shrunk contemporaries' sense of space and time, and to have contributed to an increase in anxiety.[2] Economic activity, both in workplace and leisure, was described in terms of rush, drive and urgency, whilst the spectacle of city streets was defined by cultural clichés of bustle, commotion, excitement and confusion. The psychic effects of the urban environment were envisaged in similar terms: physicians and social commentators alike wrote of the 'overstimulation' and restless excitement of urbanites,

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[1] E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910; London: Penguin, 1953), p.103.
[2] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Industrialisation and Perception of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1986) and Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud,* vol. 3, *The Cultivation of Hatred* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), p.506-7.

creating pathologies of urban life that centred around uneasiness with motion and activity. Across a wide range of discourses, every aspect of urban life was written in the same series of kinetic metaphors: the city as fevered, anxious and restless, both unsettled and unsettling.

In some respects, there was little new in these conceptualisations of urban life. As Raymond Williams demonstrated in *The Country and the City,* the literary tradition that identified the city with competition, frenzied activity, and degeneration, on the one hand, and the countryside with peace and stability, on the other, has a long history in Western thought.[3] At least since the eighteenth century, successive generations have been identified by philosophers and cultural critics as uniquely more anxious, and more 'modern', than those of earlier periods, due to the characteristic energies and upheavals of industrial capitalism.[4] Tropes of the 'shock of the city' and the 'shock of modernity' began to emerge in earnest during the mid nineteenth century, articulated through cultural depictions such as Dickens' Coketown in *Hard Times* and Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar Gipsy', in which men are worn out by 'repeated shocks, again, again' in 'this strange disease of modern life,/ With its sick hurry, its divided aims.'[5]

Yet, as Mark Jackson has recently argued in his history of stress, which he understands to have emerged from late nineteenth century discourses of nerves and nervousness: 'although earlier populations were undoubtedly distressed, both the language of stress and the perceived link between stress and disease appear to be relatively modern phenomena.' For Jackson, this intensified preoccupation with the social origins and consequences of nervousness, stress and anxiety was 'forged by a combination of political, environmental, intellectual, and cultural conditions that emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.[6] The chapter argues that the distinctive character of urban anxieties around the turn of the twentieth century was informed by both a new, widespread cultural focus on nervousness and anxiety, and new experiences of urban life. By the late nineteenth century, concerns for the potential for nervous exhaustion in modern life had spilled down from high-cultural criticism

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[3] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993).
[4] For discussion of earlier experiences of urbanisation, industrialisation and modernity, see Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), esp. pp.6-11; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), pp.15-19 and Mark Jackson, *The Age of Stress: Science and the Search for Stability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.14-15.
[5] Matthew Arnold, 'The Scholar Gipsy', in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Poems,* ed. Keith Silver (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994); Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854; London: Penguin, 2007).
[6] Jackson, p.2.

and specialised medical debates, and had become diffused throughout popular consciousness. As will be explored further in the chapter, working-class autobiographies and popular advertising indicate the extent to which the identification of 'urban hurry' with 'modern nervousness' had become part of the cultural lexicon of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.

Moreover, mass urbanisation placed a fundamental difference of emphasis on the experience of urban life. By the 1880s, Britain was the first predominantly urban society in the world: the first nation in history to conceive of itself as more urban than rural in nature. The pace and scale of suburban sprawl created a new imaginative sense of the nation: social commentators explicitly reflected on a new sense that cities were no longer to be imagined as isolated pockets dotted amid a predominantly rural England, but that the 'feelers' of urban expansion were extending so that the map of England should, increasingly, be envisaged in terms of ever-shrinking pockets of countryside. The historical identification of the nation with rural tradition, too, seemed to be under unprecedented strain. The period was a high point of both urban growth and rural-urban migration, which marked the end of a long process of rural depopulation, and provoked novelists and social commentators alike to worry over the decay of rural life and national tradition.

At the same time, the period was marked by a new awareness that the condition of life in cities referred, increasingly, to the 'Condition of England'. Earlier nineteenth-century critiques of the psychological impact of urban life often did so from the baseline of older modes of life and thought: Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy', for instance, imitates the classical pastoral mode, in which the poem is narrated from the retreat of a rural setting, with the 'shocks' and 'fatigue' of Oxford life in the distance. Yet, as tropes of the 'shock of the city' receded, new anxieties related to the pervasiveness and inescapability of urban life began to emerge. The city's encroachment was increasingly envisaged to be psychological as well as topographical, creating distinctively 'modern' and 'urban' emotional conditions and ways of seeing, and new 'types' of urbanites. Whilst, across a wide range of discourses, contemporaries expressed nostalgia for the vanishing of the rural past and pre-industrial sensibilities, they increasingly acknowledged that social retreat into older modes of life and thought was an impossibility, and that modern life in cities was an increasingly pervasive and all-encompassing mode of experience.

London looms large in this chapter. Whilst, in the mid-nineteenth century, urban anxieties had predominantly crystallised around the new industrial 'shock cities' such as Manchester and Birmingham, in the late nineteenth-and early twentieth centuries London re-emerged as the anxious city *par excellence*. London seemed, to many contemporaries, to be experiencing similar social problems simply on a larger scale than other cities; the growth of London was often understood to represent the future direction of other British cities. London was 'the problem of all problems': presenting the distinctive features of urban life 'in exaggerated form.'[7] Yet London also dramatised the pleasures, possibilities and excitements of urban life, and became the focus of a range of literary and artistic experiments that attempted to convey new experiences of the modern city and new modes of urban perception. As will be explored further in the chapter, for many writers and observers, to understand London was to understand the modern condition.

The Whirlpool

There is a sense that pervades the writings of social commentators, urban planners and novelists that the city was out of control; that urban growth was senseless, purposeless, and yet self-perpetuating at an ever-accelerating rate. The cultural metaphors of urban growth and suburban sprawl were overwhelmingly pathological.[8] Patrick Geddes' kindly organic vision of suburbia as 'the spreadings of a great coral reef' is a notable exception: more commonly, suburbs were seen to spread over the countryside 'like a disease', or 'like a bright fungoid growth.'[9] The narrator of H. G. Wells' Condition-of-England novel, *Tono-Bungay,* observed in suburban London 'the unorganised, abundant substance of some tumorous growth process, a process which indeed bursts all the outlines of the affected carcass and protrudes such masses as ignoble comfortable Croydon, as tragic impoverished West Ham'.[10] Whilst urban

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[7] See, for example, Reginald Bray, 'The Children of the Town', in Charles Masterman (ed) *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p.112.

[8] The most common analogies were to tumour, cancer and fungus: cities were described as 'a malignant cancer spot spreading day by day', 'a spreading sore swallowing up with its loathsomeness field and heath without mercy and without hope, mocking our feeble efforts to deal even with its minor evils of smoke-laden sky and befouled river.'
Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (1886; Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011), p.104; William Morris, 'Art and Socialism', (1884), quoted in Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.179.

[9] Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1915), p.26; Gissing, *Demos,* p.233; H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (1909; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.10.

[10] H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1909; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), p.88.

growth produced cultural images of tumescence and metastasis, within cities the density of population was envisaged in terms of a diseased and stagnant body politic: Charles Masterman wrote of cities such as Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool that 'the conditions of coagulation offer some parallel to this monster clot of humanity.'[11] Masterman wrote of this seemingly paradoxical dual process of urban growth, in which centrifugal and centripetal forces created two very different social problems:

> Like some gigantic plasmodium huge, blunt arms sweep forward; mansions are cut up into tenements, vegetation disappears, gardens vanish into long lines of small houses. Yet the ghetto is never satisfied; it packs its denizens denser and denser, piling them one above the other into block buildings, contracting families into one house, one storey, one room..[12]

At the same time as the centrifugal forces of urban growth seemed to be flinging cities out into the surrounding countryside, centripetal forces were 'sucking' or 'swallowing' rural inhabitants from the surrounding countryside into its depths. Wells, writing as social commentator rather than novelist, characterised the social history of the second half of the nineteenth century as

> the history of a gigantic rush of population into the magic radius of – for most people – four miles, to suffer there physical and moral disaster less acute but, finally, far more appalling to the imagination than any famine or pestilence that ever swept the world.[13]

Cities, too, seemed to be generating ever-changing versions of themselves within their boundaries. Social commentators and novelists alike wrote of anxieties resulting from the unplanned nature of urban development: of the instability and sense of ephemerality (and provisionality) that was caused by forces of social and economic change. Masterman wrote of the polluted and overcrowded 'hastily created industrial centres', as well as of 'great working-class suburbs of jerry-built houses, which will form in the future a problem as desolate as the problem now resident in the central districts'.[14] The improvised nature of jerry-building created an alarming sense that urban expansion permanently destroyed natural

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[11] Charles Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1909), p.99.
[12] Charles Masterman, 'Realities at Home', in Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p.13.
[13] H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (1901; New York: Dover Publications, 1999), p.26.
[14] Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.99; 'Realities at Home', p.24.

beauty in favour of shabby dwellings that would be temporary at best.[15] Yet even within the older boundaries of city centres, the urban environment was characterised by a sense of temporariness and upheaval. In E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, as the 'red rust' of suburbia creeps over the horizon of the English countryside, the landscape of London undergoes a similar transformation. Forster wrote of the Schlegel sisters' London residence:

> One had the sense of a backwater, or rather of an estuary, whose waters flowed in from the invisible sea, and ebbed into a profound silence while the waves without were still beating. […] These [buildings], too, would be swept away in time and another promontory would arise upon their site, as humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London.[16]

The novel's archetypal clerical worker, Leonard Bast, also inhabits 'the kind of scene that may be observed all over London, whatever the locality – bricks and mortar rising and falling within the restlessness of the water in a fountain, as the city receives more and more men upon her soil.'[17] This continual flux of the built environment is a common trope in the fiction of the period. The architecture of the city appears as transformed by invisible forces that bear little relation to the daily lives of its inhabitants. In Wells's *Tono-Bungay,* the narrator observes that

> There are wide regions of London, miles of streets of houses, that appear to have been designed for prosperous middle-class homes of the early Victorian type. There must have been a perfect fury of such buildings in the thirties, forties, fifties. Street after street must have been rushed into being […] Even while the houses were being run up, the threads upon the loom of fate were shaping to abolish altogether the type of household that would have fitted them. Means of transit were developing to carry the moderately prosperous middle classes out of London, […] new classes of hard-up middle-class people such as my uncle, employees of various types, were coming into existence, for whom no homes were to be provided. It was nobody's concern to see them housed under civilised conditions, and the beautiful laws of supply and demand had free play. They had to squeeze in.[18]

   There is a sense, in these descriptions of urban life, of people leading hastily improvised lives, in which the built environment fails to keep pace with the rhythms of social and

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[15] Urban planners lamented the tension between the economic imperatives of jerry-builders and the needs of tenants and homeowners: that such houses were 'vilely constructed of the worst possible material' and that their lifetimes were short. For example, C. B Purdom, *The Garden City: A Study in the Development of a Modern Town* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1913), p.155.
[16] Forster, p.9.
[17] Forster, p.45.
[18] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* pp.75-6.

economic change. The individual must somehow fit himself or herself into someone else's landscape, even as it changes and dissolves around them. This is a narrative that is also to be found in working-class autobiographical accounts: autobiographers often note the incongruity of their housing, in which families undergo frequent relocations and squeeze into the sublet rooms of what were once the spacious terraced houses of the aspiring middle classes. The unpublished account of Frank Goss, for example, hints at the perversity of enduring 'the evils of extreme poverty', as well as the fights and turf wars of street gangs, from the position of his family's basement room in what had until recently been a prosperous London suburb.[19]

For these working-class individuals, narrating the stories of their lives, this was simply a quotidian fact of urban life. To be sure, frequent changes of residence generated anxieties, but these were the immediate anxieties of economic uncertainty, unemployment, and whether friends would be found amongst new neighbours. For social commentators and novelists with imperatives to abstraction, however, the flux of the built environment could serve as a symbol for more existential anxieties. The destructive energies of urban growth and change could serve as a metaphor for, and parallel to, the human condition within the modern city. Forster described Edwardian Britain as a 'civilisation of luggage', in which people changed residence and accreted possessions 'without taking root in the earth'.[20]

For Forster, if city streets were written in the 'architecture of hurry', their inhabitants spoke 'the language of hurry': 'clipped words, formless sentences, potted expressions of approval or disgust. Month by month things were stepping livelier, but to what goal?'[21] For social commentators and novelists, such perceptions of hurry acquired a metaphoric significance, and were often abstracted into a single, overarching kinetic image of modernity. The energies of the metropolis became a metaphor both for the condition of England, and for the psychological condition of modern life. The city appears as 'full of the sense of vast, irrelevant movement,' 'all one spectacle of forces running to waste', a maelstrom of unplanned and uncontrolled roiling activity from which it was difficult to discern any sense of greater meaning or purpose.[22] George Gissing, amongst many others, characterised the social life of the city as a whirlpool: 'the whirlpool of the furiously busy. Round and round

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[19] Frank Goss, *My Boyhood at the Turn of the Century*, TS, 2:331, Burnett Archive of Working-Class Autobiographies, Brunel University, p.33.
[20] Forster, p.141.
[21] Forster, pp.102-3.
[22] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* pp. 85 and 346.

they go; brains humming till they melt or explode.' For Gissing, urbanites were 'gripped, worried, dragged down', by the 'artificial necessities' of middle-class respectability.[23]

It was this sense of the pathological aimlessness of modern hurry on which such anxieties were centred: a sense of misdirected energies.[24] There is an apparent tension, in such concerns, between a desire for rest, on the one hand, and a desire for progress on the other. 'Hurry' becomes the pejorative shorthand for a world in which narratives of progress have become strained, and in which, without a unifying thread of narrative, activity thus appears as meaningless and suggestive of morbidity. In *The Time Machine,* Wells's narrator saw amid the apparent progress modern civilisation 'only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end'.[25] The forces of urban growth and change seemed to be acquiring a momentum of their own, in which the energies of progress had turned towards destruction. Masterman pushed this kinetic metaphor still further, writing that the modern city presented 'the appearance of a complicated machine, which has escaped the control of all human volition, and is progressing towards no intelligible goal; of some black windmill, with gigantic wings, rotating untended under the huge spaces of night.'[26]

The future direction of cities in modernity, and the emotional lives of urban inhabitants became subject to the same diagnosis: cultural metaphors for the process of urban growth as a whole were similarly applied at the level of social as well as individual psychology. The breakdown of visible narratives of teleological purpose leads on the one hand to cultural metaphors of the city-as-vortex, an image of human activity spiralling back upon itself, to no known aim; and on the other to human endeavour as pooled and stagnant amid the 'swamp' of urban life.[27] For Masterman, 'experience in the heart of such a universe of necessity takes

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[23] George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (1897; Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2014), p.144.
Commenting upon *The Whirlpool,* H. G. Wells abstracted the novel's central metaphor still further, into a figure for the kinetic energies of urban life: 'Well has Mr. George Gissing named nineteenth-century London in one of his great novels the "Whirlpool," the very figure for the nineteenth-century Great City, attractive, tumultuous, and spinning down to death.' Wells, *Anticipations,* p.26.
[24] Gissing railed against the sheer purposelessness of activity in the modern city: 'there's no leisure, no meditation, no peace and quietness […] instead of conversing, people just not and shout to each other as they spin round the gulf.' Gissing, *The Whirlpool,* p.104.
[25] H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, (1895), in *H. G. Wells Classic Collection,* vol. 1 (London: Gollancz, 2010), p.84.
[26] Masterman, *The Condition of England*, pp.45-6.
[27] Masterman lamented the fractured nature of experience in the modern city: 'a world where the one single system of a traditional hierarchy has fissured into a thousand diversified channels, with eddies and breakwaters, whirlpools and sullen marches, and every variety of vigour, somnolence and decay.' Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.12. For further discussion, see Chapter 3, 'All that is solid melts into air.'

upon itself a character of bewilderment.'[28] The restlessness and hurry of urban life is internalised by its inhabitants: 'a certain artificiality distinguishes such an existence, a divorce from reality.'[29] The destructive energies of urban growth and change were thus seen to be irreconcilable from a pathology of urban life, in which the human condition in the modern city was understood to be becoming irreparably warped and shaped by the forces at work in the urban environment.

Nervousness and the 'New Town Type'

In *The Whirlpool,* Gissing describes a scene in a London drawing room: 'the hostess rose languidly, with a pallid, hollow-eyed look of illness. "Only my neuralgic something or other," she said in reply to a sympathetic enquiry. "It's the price one pays for civilisation".'[30] Such anxieties are common in the period's literature. In *Howards End,* Charles Wilcox remarks to Margaret Schlegel: 'we are all mad more or less, you know, these days.'[31] Allusions to nervous disorders, and to the wider cultural climate that favoured modern nervousness, were part of the fabric of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century culture. Peter Gay noted that late Victorians and Edwardians were not simply anxious – there was also 'widespread anxiety about anxiety'. Contemporary observers frequently expressed concerns surrounding the mental costs of the age of hurry: 'a solid majority […] pointed the finger directly at their industrialising, urbanising times and blamed what they called "attacks of nerves" on the adjustments that the nineteenth century had been forcing on its populations.' 'In a word,' Gay wrote, 'they blamed the age of energy itself for making people feverish and tremulous.'[32]

These anxieties about anxiety were central to contemporary discourses of urban life, and were held to be at once symptomatic and causative of the wider process of physical degeneration believed to be at work in the modern industrial city.[33] Concerns about

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[28] Charles Masterman, *In Peril of Change: Essays Written in Time of Tranquility* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1905), p.xiii.
[29] Masterman, *In Peril of Change,* pp.264-5.
[30] Gissing, *The Whirlpool,* p.176.
[31] Forster, p.262
[32] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience,* vol.5, *Pleasure Wars* (London: Fontana Press, 1998), pp.12-13.
[33] For example, Andrew Lees writes of the late Victorian and Edwardian belief 'that deleterious physical surroundings produced inferior physical specimens and that such city dwellers could not maintain a stable let

degeneration were a powerful motif in fin-de-siècle culture: the evolutionary language of decline resonated through a wide range of discourses. Social commentators as well as physicians identified a new 'type' of person that was being bred amid the conditions of urban life. Charles Masterman identified the 'City type' and the 'New Town Type': the 'street-bred' urban working- and lower-middle classes, who were held to be

> physically, mentally and spiritually different from the type characteristic of Englishmen during the past two hundred years. […] The result is the production of a characteristic *physical* type of town dweller: stunted, narrow-chested, easily wearied; yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina, or endurance – seeking stimulus in drink, in betting.[34]

The physical and psychological effects of urban life were understood to be inextricable. For Masterman, city life was characterised by the 'perpetual presence of a multitude of minor maladies – weariness, small nervous disorders, irritability, digestive disorganisation'.[35] For the physician J. Milner Fothergill, the city constantly overstimulated men's psyches, resulting in 'a tendency to have neurotic troubles'. 'The highly strung neurosal woman' characteristic of modern urban life was held to be unfit, or unable, to raise a healthy family.[36] As has been noted by Andrew Lees and many other historians of the fin-de-siècle, the ultimate expression of such anxieties was fear for the future of empire: that physical degeneration posed a threat to national security and was indicative of 'a dying race'.[37]

The causes of physical deterioration and nervousness were thus held to be located in the modern industrial city. For Masterman and many others, 'Modern civilisation in its most highly organised forms has elaborated a system to which the delicate fibre of body and mind

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along a growing population on their own. Many observers, particularly but by no means only in the ranks of the medical profession, voiced deep fears that the continued growth of cities posed an ominous threat to the health, the size, and even the eventual survival of the [urban population.]', Lees, p.136.

[34] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', pp.7-8.

[35] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', p.24.
The physician J. P. Williams-Freeman wrote similarly that 'the child of the townsman is "bred too fine", it is too great an exaggeration of himself, excitable and painfully precocious in its childhood, neurotic, dyspeptic, pale, and undersized in its adult state, if it ever reach it.' J. P. Williams-Freeman, *The Effect of Town Life on the General Health, with Especial Reference to London* (London: W. H. Allen, 1890), p.5.

[36] J. Milner Fothergill, *The Town Dweller: His Needs and Wants* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1889), pp.96-7.
This was a point on which Williams-Freeman concurred, asserting that 'females, too, although possibly prolific, are not good mothers, sometimes giving a large quantity of feebly nourishing milk, sometimes producing none.' Williams-Freeman, p.5.
James Cantlie, in a medical treatise on *Degeneration Amongst Londoners,* coined the term 'urbomorbus', or 'city disease', to encompass these diffuse mental and physical effects of city life into a single diagnosis. James Cantlie, *Degeneration Amongst Londoners* (London: Field and Tuer, Leadenhall Press, 1885), p.24.

[37] Lees, pp.138-40. and Fothergill, p.108.

is unable to respond.'[38] The density of urban settlement, the variety of the built environment and the pace of human activity in the modern industrial city were conceived of in terms of the action of nervous stimuli upon the psyches of urbanites, and the potential for nervous exhaustion. It was believed that urban dwellers were required to make psychological adaptations in order to cope with this increase in nervous stimuli, resulting in a distinctive mode of urban perception. In his essay on 'The Town Child' in *The Heart of the Empire,* Reginald Bray wrote of the effects of the urban environment upon child psychology:

> There is found in the child an acute perception of all that occurs around him, a vast knowledge of isolated events and people […] But nothing connects them together, nothing preserves them in memory […] the past is little more than a miscellaneous collection of the scenes of the last few years.[39]

For Bray, this lack of any schema of meaning or order led to the development in urban-born children of an 'excitable disposition': 'mentally, it tends to create people of quick, superficial intelligence', a view echoed by Masterman, who wrote of 'a certain temper of fickle excitability' amongst 'the "street-bred people" of the twentieth century'.[40] Such anxieties were not restricted to concerns surrounding the overcrowded conditions of the working classes. Masterman wrote, too, of the middle and upper classes, who took refuge from the tumult of city life with holidays in rural England and the Swiss Alps: 'anywhere in which the too-exasperated material of the human mind can be nursed back into a semblance of sanity.' Yet with the start of the social season, 'they gather, from the four winds, into the tumult of the capital, to occupy the remaining half of the year in deliberate tearing of the fabric of that mind to pieces in an orgy of human intercourse.'[41]

For Masterman and Bray, among many others, it was not just the increase in nervous stimuli that contributed to this sense of restlessness: nervousness induced by the hurry of urban life was compounded by the artificiality of the city, and a lack of access to the beauty and stillness of nature. Masterman described the daily lives of lower-middle-class clerical workers, who were often held to be archetypal of the new 'type' of urbanite being formed in the modern city:

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[38] Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.22.
[39] Reginald Bray, 'The Town Child', in *The Heart of the Empire,* pp.119-20.
[40] Bray, p.126, and Masterman, 'Realities at Home, p.7.
[41] Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.44.

> Divorced from the ancient sanities of manual or skillful labour, of exercise in the open air, absorbed for the bulk of his day in crowded offices adding sums or writing letters, each a unit in a crowd which has drifted away from the realities of life in a complex artificial city civilisation.[42]

> The mind thus "cabined, cribbed, confined" turns instinctively to any course of stimulating excitement. Betting, the unlimited abuse of stimulants, and the noisy boisterousness of the modern English crowd reveal the ravages of the disease of modern life.[43]

Similarly, Bray described the outlook of the town child: 'from the windows of their homes the children look out, not on distant fields and woods, but on rows of adjacent houses that hem them in on every side.' He argued that it was this privileging of the 'human element' in urban life that was at work in the creation of modern nervousness: 'the whole town world is a world of human beings, surrounded by human beings, overarched with human beings.' Severed from the experience of nature, life in an entirely man-made world seemed to exaggerate some aspects of the human temperament and stifle others. Lack of access to nature, coupled with the restlessness of urban life, was thus seen to lead to social disorder: 'the human element in excess gives to the town child that restless temperament which appears in its most accentuated form as Hooliganism.'[44] Patrick Geddes, too, attributed urban disorder in part to the loss of the experience of nature: 'It is primarily for lack of this touch of first-hand rustic experience that we have forced young energy into hooliganism; or, even worse, depressed it below that level.'[45]

Nervousness, Degeneration and Horrible Bodies

The use of 'touch', here, is significant: the discourse of urban restlessness was overwhelmingly concerned with visual and aural perception. Concerns for the increase in nervous stimuli in city life were predominantly articulated in terms of assaults upon the eye and the ear: row upon row of houses, face after face in the urban crowd, ceaseless streams of trains and cars flying past the observer, the roar and rattle of busy streets, the metallic clang of industrial activity, and so on. These descriptions of urban scenes in social commentary are

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[42] Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.92.
[43] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', pp.27-8.
[44] Bray, p.115.
[45] Geddes, p.99.

frequently articulated through long lists of fleeting and disconnected phenomena. Reginald Bray's assessment is typical:

> A mass of impressions are hurled at the observer, a thousand scenes sweep by him; but there is nothing to hold them together, nothing to produce a sense of order, nothing to give a perception of similarity. All is bewilderingly different. Consider, for example, the public street: an interminable stream of men and women flow by, nearly all of whom present unknown faces; an unending line of vehicles move on, ceaselessly altering and apparently coming out of the nowhere and going into the nowhere. There is only a chaotic confusion of change with nothing permanent to be the supporter and bearer of the change.[46]

The effect of this 'continuous panorama of shifting scenes' is disorientating: disconnected phenomena are hurled at the reader with disconcerting rapidity, and one is left with the impression of the author's restless eye flitting and darting to and fro, perpetuating its own bewilderment. The passage imposes a sense of restlessness upon the scene as much as it purports dispassionately to observe it. It is as if the perceived momentum of urban life leads to a kind of motion sickness: a disordering of the inner sense of balance. Visual and aural perception seems magnified out of proportion to the life of the body: the reader is left with a sense of authors revolving within their own anxieties surrounding urban life, longing to plant their hands and their feet upon solid ground. The much-vaunted 'sanities' of nature, in contrast, often centre on the sense of tactility: manual labour, the warmth of the sun, the softness of a breeze, a society 'in touch' with the soil and the slow changing of the seasons. Edward Carpenter, a vocal advocate for the psychic importance of the sense of touch, wrote that modern urban life entailed 'the abnormal development of the abstract intellect in comparison with the physical senses on the one hand, and the moral sense on the other […] man builds himself an intellectual world apart from the great actual universe around him […] he cannot face the open air.'[47] For Carpenter, this disunity between body and mind, characteristic of urban life, was the seat of both mental and physical disease.

Anxieties surrounding the physical effects of urban life were similarly articulated by physicians and social commentators through long lists of symptoms – elaborate taxonomies of urban pathology – in which the same series of ailments recur in shifting combinations.[48]

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[46] Bray, p.119.
[47] Carpenter, p.57.
[48] The general sickliness of modern people was frequently asserted. Carpenter, for example, stated that 'wherever we look to-day, in mansion or slum, we see the features and hear the complaints of ill-health; the

Degeneration was defined by catalogues of incrementally worsening symptoms: Carpenter wrote that the typical urbanite, working indoors,

> ceases to a great extent to use his muscles, his feet become partially degenerate, his teeth wholly, his digestion so enervated […] And so with this denial of Nature comes every form of disease; first delicatesse, daintiness, luxury; then unbalance, enervation, huge susceptibility to pain […] he falls prey to his own organs […] every corner and cranny of his body becomes the scene and symbol of disease.[49]

There is, in these descriptions of the urban population, a measure of misanthropy occasioned by this new awareness of a modern urban 'type': a sense of horror and disgust at the image of horrible bodies. Charles Kingsley's widely influential essay on 'Great Cities and Their Influence for Good and Evil' (1857), which was regularly reprinted throughout the late nineteenth century, contained a similar list of clerical maladies: 'their nerves and brain have been excited at the expense of their lungs, their digestion, and their whole nutritive system. Their complexions show a general ill health. Their mouths, too often, hint at latent disease.'[50] The urban population appears as subjected to intense scrutiny by social commentators, who peer into every anatomical 'corner and cranny', and inspect the mouths of urban inhabitants with the proprietary directness of one assessing a horse for purchase. There is a kind of obsessiveness in these descriptions of degenerated bodies – a pathological yearning for clean, wholesome, healthy bodies, that seems itself somewhat unwholesome. There is perhaps something inherently pathological, too, in the tendency to catalogue symptoms of degeneracy, to create lengthy indexes of urban maladies and draw up frenetic lists of instances of urban restlessness and hurry. These lists seem to *administer* a sense of restlessness to the reader, to administer a sense of vague ill health. The process of 'retrojection' that Michael Kimmel observes in pervasive cultural metaphors, in which symbolic language 'comes to be felt inside the body,' can be observed to be at work.[51] These modes of perception come, to an extent, to be internalised by individuals, who in turn project their anxieties outwards and onto the bodies of others.

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difficulty is really to find a healthy person.' The state of 'modern civilised man' was characterised by 'coughs, colds, mufflers, dread of a waft of chill air, &c.' Carpenter, p.16.

[49] Carpenter, pp.47-8.

[50] Charles Kingsley, 'Great Cities and Their Influence for Good and Evil' (1857), in *The Works of Charles Kinglsey,* vol.XVIII, *Sanitary and Social Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), pp.210-211.

[51] Michael Kimmel, 'Properties of Cultural Embodiment: Lessons from the Anthropology of the Body', in Roselyn M. Frank, Rene Dirven, Tom Ziemke, and Enrique Bernardez (eds), *Body, Language and Mind,* vol.2, *Sociocultural Situatedness* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), pp.99-101.

Such anxieties were by no means confined to those of social elites: the medicalised registers of nervousness and degeneration became defining idioms of the age. They were to be found throughout late Victorian and Edwardian culture: not only in works of medicine, social theory, fiction and journalism, but also in the period's advertising, as well as the autobiographical accounts of working men and women.

Throughout the period, advertisements aimed at working-class men and women as well as the prosperous middle classes reflected the widespread contemporary preoccupation with nervousness. Advertisements, of course, do not straightforwardly represent social reality; advertisers had a clear economic logic to encourage exaggerated anxiety in order to present their products as a solution. Yet the tropes of anxiety employed most consistently in advertisements must be familiar to consumers in order for them to be effective, and so advertisements must contain an element of 'truth' in their appeals to social perceptions or realities, however distorted it may be by economic imperatives. In this sense, the advertisements of the period can reveal much about late Victorian and Edwardian hopes, fears and aspirations. Patent medicine adverts, ubiquitous in the popular press, asked their readers 'what is this disease that is coming upon us?', asserting the ever-increasing prevalence of nervous disorders in society: 'Nervousness is the growing malady of the age: hysteria, hypochondria and neurasthenia are increasing with fearful rapidity.'[52] Such advertisements created a profile of the modern sufferer, who 'becomes nervous, irritable and gloomy, and has evil forebodings'.[53] Testimonials had consumers attest that 'my nerves got so bad I would shut myself up and felt as though I never wanted to see or speak to anybody', or confess that 'I was always in an unfounded terror that something terrible was going to happen, and every little thing worried me for no reason whatsoever.'[54] Advertisers reinforced and exploited the anxieties of working- and middle-class consumers with promises to 'tone up the nervous system'.[55] Such advertising strategies were not restricted to health foods and

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[52] 'Siegel's Curative Syrup', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 8th March 1884; 'Wincarnis Tonic Wine', *Graphic,* 5th May 1906.

[53] 'Siegel's Curative Syrup', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 8th March 1884.

[54] 'Phospherine', 1901-2, Historical Advertising Trust.

[55] 'Phospherine', for example, a preparation that marketed itself as something of a cure-all for mental malaise, informed consumers that 'if you are disposed to worry over trifling matters, it is because your nerves have become irritated and need Phospherine to soothe them. If you are tired of life, and wish yourself dead, it is because your nerves have become poisoned and require Phospherine to purify them […] Phospherine purifies poisoned nerves, tones up weak nerves, sets right deranged nerves.' Van Houten's Cocoa', *Harmsworth,* 1899, Historical Advertising Trust; Phospherine', *Graphic,* 1st June 1901 .

patent medicines: domestic groceries, from cocoa to cigarettes and soap, were frequently marketed as calming and empowering the consumer in an age of anxiety.

Advertisers, too, situated their products within debates over degeneration and the fitness of the race, employing the Social Darwinist language of competition, writing of the 'race of life',[56] the 'struggling for supremacy',[57] or asserting that 'the struggle for existence in competition makes life a fight day in and day out'.[58] In particular, they exploited the climate of uncertainty surrounding the physical fitness of urban recruits for the Imperial frontier: the manufacturers of Eno's Fruit Salt, for example, asked somewhat hysterically, 'IS THE FALL OF ENGLAND'S GREATNESS NEAR AT HAND?', linking the perils of a sluggish gut to inability to defend a global empire.[59]

That these were exclusively *urban* concerns was an unchallenged commonplace: advertisements consistently referred to pathologies of urban life, whilst advertisers endowed commodities with the supposedly health-giving virtues of the countryside. Manufacturers of tonic wine, for instance, alluded to the common cultural motif of the sickly clerical worker, enervated and vitiated amid the artificiality of indoor work. Sanatogen pushed the slogan '20th century man' to illustrate how pathological were modern lifestyles, contrasting an image of a robust classical warrior, sword in hand, with a worried-looking man hunched over his desk and holding a pair of glasses [Figure 1].[60] Meanwhile, a competitor asserted that

> The health and strength of the farmer is proverbial. The conquering, victorious spirits, indicative of energy, buoyancy and enthusiasm, come from the country air. […] The men and women who toil from nine to six in the dusty and vitiated atmosphere of crowded city offices long for a little of the fragrant oxygen which gives the ruddy glow of health to the farmer […] Note the thousands of waxy, pale faces going to business every morning.[61]

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[56] 'Driving Boots', *Harmsworth,* October 1899, Historical Advertising Trust.
[57] 'Coleman's Nerve Pills', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 5th January 1907.
[58] 'Century Bath Cabinet', *Harmsworth,* February 1903, Historical Advertising Trust.
[59] 'Eno's Fruit Salt', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 3rd August 1889.
[60] The copy reads: 'In what are euphemistically described as the 'good old days' Man rose at dawn, went to his labour in the fields, or engaged in the chase, and retired at sundown to enjoy a long and sound night's rest. But present-day conditions, with their tremendous competition and consequent strain on the nervous system, have altered all this. Man has the ever-increasing trials and worries of a professional, political or commercial career… In the stress and turmoil of modern existence we continually overdraw on the bank of life'. 'Sanatogen', *Graphic,* 7th November 1908.
[61] 'Wincarnis Tonic Wine', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 5th December 1908.

[Figure 1] Advertisement for Santatogen, *Graphic,* 7th November 1908.

The accounts of working-class autobiographers, too, indicate how pervasive were the twin discourses of nervousness and degeneration in discussions of the modern industrial city. Several autobiographers describe their own experiences of anxiety disorders, or those of their family members. Jack Goring wrote in his unpublished autobiography of the struggles of his early working life in London, first in a jewellery workshop and then (ironically enough) in advertising: 'in the very early eighties I had an attack of what was later labelled Neurasthenia.'[62] Throughout his account, his struggles with mental and physical ill health are articulated through the opposition of the country and the city. Though Goring, who was born in Kensal Green, spent much of his life in London, he wrote at length of his 'Berkshire ancestry' – to which he ascribed his lifelong 'love of the country'. He described the initial decades of his adulthood, in which he lived and worked in London, as the 'Slough of Despond'. But he wrote that his doctor's prescription of a 'restive', combined with the inspiration Goring found in the writings of Tolstoy, helped him to overcome his malaise.[63] The narrative of his life is written in the familiar trope of finding peace and satisfaction in the simplicity of rural life: Goring subsequently moved to the Tolstoyan colony at Purleigh in Essex, and thence to a country cottage in a neighbouring village. Whilst his working life in London is characterised by worry, 'doubt and depression' (indeed, 'life' is crossed out in this instance and manually annotated with '^perhaps I should say livelihood' in the typescript),

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[62] Jack Goring, 'Untitled', MS, 1:274, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, p.138.
[63] Goring, pp.30A and 139.

his latter years in rural Essex are written in the language of rest and happiness, and narrated through the natural rhythms of digging and planting his country garden.[64]

Other autobiographers similarly alluded to the anxieties of urban and industrial employment. Winifred Till, in her unpublished memoir, wrote of her rural-urban migrant father who took a job in a locomotive factory: 'the responsibility of working to 1000th part of an inch worried him and he suffered a lot from digestive ills.'[65] V. W. Garratt, who worked as a teenager in a Birmingham sheet metal factory, wrote that factory work and the 'poisons and depressions of work-a-day life' made him 'mentally sick' – a condition that was only relieved by walks in the surrounding countryside.[66] Anxieties surrounding working life in the city could be articulated, too, in terms of degeneration and physical deterioration. Harry Young remembered the decline in his father's health, compounded by the financial uncertainty of operating a small business: 'in particularly bad times, round about 1912/3 he would suffer the most destructive bouts of anxiety and nervous frustration, producing chronic irritation which my mother in true cockney parlance called "The Rats".'[67] Young reflected almost unbearably of this decline:

> I think of him now, forty years later, with bitter regrets and heartfelt remorse. The metamorphosis from commuting to London from Southend (he was one of the first) resplendent in his Tall hat and frock coat to the shuffling emaciated bundles of greasy rags he became, "Dirty Dick" rivalled the insect world. […] At last the end came, and my mother told me that when the undertaker came, his corpse was carried downstairs by one man under one arm – he was literally a bag of wasted bones.[68]

Young's mixed evocations of disgust, horror and pathos contrast markedly to the detached disgust of social commentators observing the deteriorated bodies of the urban masses from a distance. In retrospect, for Young, the story of his father's life resonated with chilling poignancy with Edwardian debates surrounding the role of eugenics in combating degeneration and the 'decline of the race':

> It was only 50 years later when reading my son's PhD Thesis on the "Influence of Darwin on Eugenics" that I discovered that neither I, nor he, should be here at all. According to the 1913 McKenna Bill (never implemented) among the categories due

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[64] Goring, pp.158, 220 and 255.
[65] Winifred Till, *The Early Years of a Victorian Grandmother,* TS, 2:763, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, p.6.
[66] V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939), pp. 116 and 131.
[67] Harry Young, *Harry's Biography,* TS, 2:858, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, p.5.
[68] Young, pp.8-9.

for sterilisation, in addition to inmates of Poorhouses, Idiots, Imbeciles, Alcoholics, Epileptics and feeble minded persons were pupils of Industrial Schools (vagrants). He was to have been "deprived the opportunity of procreating children". Perhaps it is a pity he was not. He was certainly deprived of everything else.[69]

Daniel Pick, as well as Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman, have argued that the language of degeneration sought to comprehend the 'dark side' of progress: the elements and consequences of modernity that could not be incorporated into teleological narratives of progress. The degenerationist mentality centred not only on the effects of urban poverty and squalor, but also on vaguer anxieties surrounding the nature of mass society.[70] As such, degenerationism performed a dual role. On the one hand, it was concerned with the figure of the degenerate as the 'Other': physicians and social commentators sought to identify the 'type' of the degenerate, creating pathologies of urban life and elaborate taxonomies of physical decline. On the other, degenerationist thinking was allied to fears of invisible and all-pervasive forces of decay in modern life, and sweeping diagnoses of the human condition. It was this vagueness at the heart of the concept of degeneration that made it particularly suitable both with which to articulate a wide range of social and cultural anxieties, and to perpetuate and intensify these same fears. Concrete and immediate anxieties surrounding urban poverty, overcrowding and disease became attached to vague and shifting notions of cultural decline – a literal slippery slope – in which scientific exposition slid imperceptibly into metaphor, and back again. Yet, at the same time, the very capaciousness of this discourse was of functional value in managing and regulating anxiety. Generalised and diffuse anxieties about the consequences of urbanisation and modernisation could be 'contained' within the narrative of degeneration, and projected onto disgust for the social 'Other'.

Urban Growth and the Problem of Representation

In _Howards End,_ E. M. Forster asserted of London: 'it is impossible to see modern life steadily and see it whole'.[71] Similarly In _The Soul of London,_ Ford Madox Ford wrote of the

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[69] Young, p.9.
[70] Daniel Pick, _Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder c.1848-1918_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (eds), _Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress_ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.ix-xiv.
[71] Forster, p.152.

difficulty of forming 'any picture, any impression of London as a whole'.[72] *Tono-Bungay*'s Edward Ponderevo, a character usually given to fits of hyperbole, informs his nephew in telling understatement: 'London, George […] takes a lot of understanding.'[73] The sheer scale of the modern industrial city presented new emotional challenges to its contemporaries, namely: how to represent and conceive of a vast, heterogeneous and essentially unknowable urban landscape. The growth of British cities, and especially London, over the course of the nineteenth century placed an unprecedented strain upon established linguistic strategies for representing the city – contemporary observers of urban life seem to have experienced a 'crisis of language', running out of superlatives with which to describe metropolitan expansion.[74] The end of the century witnessed an attempt to create a specialised language of urban life, to articulate a condition of 'cityness' that seemed of urgent importance in an era of unprecedented metropolitan expansion, and in which the topographical merged with the psychological.[75] Indeed, in his intellectual and cultural history of urban representation, *The City in Literature,* Richard Lehan views the experience of the city as central to the modernist imagination, and related to modern consciousness itself. He writes that modernism represents 'the move from an objective to a subjective view of the city'.[76] Across a range of genres, from sociology to avant-garde fiction, the city was increasingly being envisaged not just as a place, but a state of mind, and urban knowledge was increasingly becoming an emotional problem.

This problem of representation was, first and foremost, a problem of representing London. As the largest city in the world by some distance, and by 1900 home to one in five inhabitants of England and Wales, it seemed to defy attempts to conceive of it as a single, cohesive entity.[77] Yet what was true of London seemed to be the case for the process of urbanisation as a whole: the growth of London seemed to many contemporaries to represent the future direction of other British cities. The contributors to the influential collection of essays *The Heart of the Empire: discussion of problems of modern city life in Britain,* edited by Charles

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[72] Ford Madox Hueffer [= Ford], *The Soul of London – A Survey of a Modern City* (1905; Redditch: Read Books Ltd, 2011), p.7.

[73] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* p.77.

[74] William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 'From "Great Town" to "Nonplace Urban Realm": Reading the Modern City', in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (eds), *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art and Literature* (New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983), p.18.

[75] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.3.

[76] Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.73.

[77] Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.249.

Masterman, justified the volume's primary focus upon London: Masterman wrote that the 'problem' of urbanisation was 'intensified in London, where it has attained its furthest development', but that 'it is equally manifest in the other great aggregations of the nation.'[78] Reginald Bray asserted in the introduction to his essay that 'London is itself the problem of all problems. Presenting in an exaggerated form all the peculiar features of city life, it stands like some voiceless prophet.'[79] Moreover, London often figured as an analogy and example for urbanisation in the abstract: social commentators and novelists frequently slipped without comment from discussions of London to expositions of urban growth and change at a national and even global level. For many writers, to understand London was to understand the modern condition.

Nicholas Freeman argues that the fluidity and dynamism of late-nineteenth century London, and the scale and pace of its growth, presented 'profound challenges' to literature and art, as well as to empiricist areas of social enquiry. He sees realism, as the dominant form of artistic representation during the nineteenth century, being placed under 'enormous pressure, buckling and twisting into shapes that had never before been imagined […] Victorian writers and artists attempted to conceive of a city for which earlier languages were no longer adequate.' [80] For Freeman, such challenges were at once 'theoretical, technical and conceptual'.[81] The question of how one might set about representing London was inextricably connected to how the metropolis might be conceived of at an imaginative level. In this sense, the question of how to represent and conceive of the urban landscape was an emotional problem, the solution to which promised a solution to urban anxieties, transforming the unknown into the familiar. To 'map' London via literary, visual and statistical techniques might be to impose a level of imaginative control upon the urban landscape.

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[78] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', p.47.
[79] Reginald Bray, 'The Children of the Town', in *The Heart of the Empire,* p.112.
[80] Freeman, p.26.
[81] Freeman, p.34.
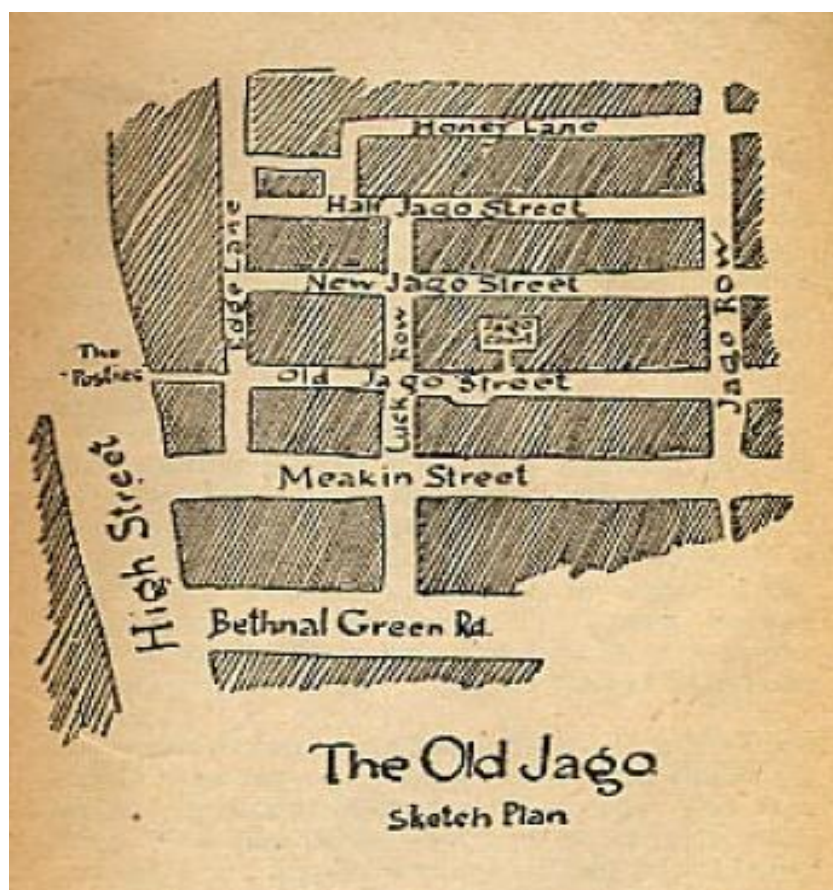
[Figure 2] from Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (1896; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

The drive to map London was visible not just in the statistical endeavours of British sociologists, but was also to be found in the fiction of the period. Realist fiction tended to create 'knowable' communities by focusing on specific and bounded areas of London, as in the slum novels of George Gissing and Arthur Morrison. As it became ever more unmanageable to conceive of London as a whole, a focus on the seemingly self-contained horizons of slum life enabled realist authors to pursue their aim of the minute delineation of the urban environment, and its effects upon human character. Arthur Morrison's enormously popular slum novel, *A Child of the Jago,* for example, confined its narrative within the claustrophobic limits of a single slum, in which its characters are inescapably trapped.[82] The novel opens with a map of the Jago, offering a somewhat distant perspective on the slum [Figure 1]. The reader remains aloof from its labyrinthine streets. It seems analogous to the perspective of city planners, or of the maps of London produced by social researchers such as Charles Booth [Figure 2]. It seeks to make urban life comprehensible, to rise above a chaotic

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[82] Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (1896; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

street-level view of urban deprivation, and map clearly the deterministic force of environment.

[Figure 3] Map of Whitechapel from Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London,* vol.1, *East London* (London: Macmillan, 1889).

Yet *A Child of the Jago* is also suggestive of the limits to this form of urban knowledge: even within the limited confines of the Jago, the chaotic street-level view of the slum belies the apparent cartographic order of the city streets. As one recent critic of the novel has commented, the map of the slum offers a deceptively assured 'essay in intellectual possession', lending only a semblance of order to what at street level presents 'a view that even some of the inhabitants of that street have difficulty in distinguishing from a prospect of hell.'[83] It is as if the reader is being asked to extrapolate from that one tiny square of the map

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[83] Peter Miles, 'Introduction', in Morrison, *A Child of the Jago,* pp.viii-ix.

of London the unutterable vastness and complexity of human life in the city, and of the unfathomable extent of human suffering.

H. G. Wells, too, noted the emotional and imaginative difficulties of apprehending London as a kind of vast patchwork of human activity, out of which grew a single city beyond individual comprehension. The narrator of *Tono-Bungay,* George Ponderevo, remarks of London as he travels down the Thames:

> And amidst it all no plan appears, no intention, no comprehensive desire. That is the very key of it all. Each day one feels that the pressure of commerce and traffic grew, grew insensibly monstrous, and first this man made a wharf and that erected a crane, and then this company set to work and that, and so they jostled together to make this unassimilable enormity of traffic.[84]

Whilst, for George, London could not be subjected to a single comprehensive schema, it could be read as a kind of palimpsest. A measure of order was to be found behind the fluid and ever-changing appearance of the city, in which many different Londons could be glimpsed: overlapping and overlaid. Observed from the right perspective, one could apprehend a spatial and temporal narrative of the metropolis:

> To run down the Thames is to run one's hands over the pages in the book of England from end to end. One begins in Craven Reach and it is as if one were in the heart of old England. Behind us are Kew and Hampton Court with their memories of Kings and Cardinals […] Putney, too looks Anglican on a dwindling scale. And then for a stretch the newer developments slop over […] and there come first squalid stretches of mean homes right and left and then the dingy industrialism of the south side. […] What a long slow crescendo that is, mile after mile, with the houses crowding closelier […] And then the traditional and ostensible England falls from you altogether. The third movement begins, the last great movement in the London symphony, in which the trim scheme of the old order is altogether dwarfed and swallowed up. Comes London Bridge, and the great warehouses tower up and about you waving stupendous cranes, the gulls circle and scream in your eyes, large ships lie among their lighters, and one is in the port of the world.[85]

Indeed, reading the development of London as pages in a book (albeit, with the pages flipping and flickering between one's hands) is one of two forms of imaginative representation in the passage: the city, too, could be perceived as a symphony. The flux and mutability of London, which at times is suggestive to George of chaos and destruction, has become ameliorated into a musical fluidity. And yet, whilst fluid, the metaphor of London-

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[84] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* p.351.
[85] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* pp.348-350.

as-symphony is guided by a measure of order and predictability: the structure of movements and crescendos.

However, for others, the multiplicity of these different 'versions' of London could be productive of anxieties. In her semi-fictionalised autobiography of slum life, *Jipping Street,* Kathleen Woodward wrote of an abortive journey on the Thames. Woodward recalled an elderly neighbour, Jessica, who during her lifetime had never left the confines of their East End neighbourhood: 'on reflection it troubled me that Jessica was so wanting in worldly experience, and I conceived a plan for taking her out into the world, showing her London from a larger angle than Jipping Street.' She booked a trip to Hampton Court for the two of them on a pleasure steamer that departed from London Bridge:

> We had reached Westminster when I saw that Jessica, tense and pale with distrust of the smooth waters gliding past our bows, and terrified by the dark bridges which threatened to strike us down as we approached, could bear it no longer. Feverishly clutching my arm with one hand, and the rail of the gang plank with the other, Jessica led us to the "blessed earth," turning her back with a sigh of relief on travel and adventure. […] For weeks her remarks on this excursion into the outside world were divided between her concern for the fate of the tickets and poignant recollections of that "feeling upside down inside" which had overcome her between London Bridge and Westminster.[86]

Emotionally, the narrative reads as an inversion of George Ponderevo's journey down the Thames: from the enclosed security of slum life to the imposing, anxiety-inducing spectacle of Westminster. It is an inversion, too, of the well-worn narrative in late Victorian social commentary of the journey into the East End as an exploration into the unknown, such as William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out.*[87] It seems that from whatever social perspective – whether the Olympian view of social theorists surveying the city from a distance, or the street-level view of working-class autobiographers – the coexistence of these multiple identities of London was difficult to assimilate. Even lifelong Londoners, at ease amid the squalor and deprivation of slum life, could be frightened by the immensity and multiplicity of the metropolis.

What perhaps links these representations of London are anxieties surrounding the contradictions and discordant elements of urban life, and a drive to conceive of the modern

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[86] Kathleen Woodward, *Jipping Street* (1928; London: Virago, 1983), pp.117-8.
[87] William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890).

city as a totality; a drive to map the energy, multiplicity and fluidity of the urban landscape as a single, totalising image. As Jonathan Rose writes, the 'Edwardian temperament' aimed towards synthesis: it was a cultural imagination that sought to eliminate conflicts, to reconcile opposites, to connect seemingly unconnected phenomena, and to establish a sense of unity and wholeness. [88] Cultural anxieties surrounding disconnection and disunity became magnified amid the complexity of the city – a complexity that did not lend itself to being incorporated into a cohesive schema. London seemed to resist integration into any single, master image. Ford Madox Ford, for example, wrote of the impossibility of apprehending any imaginative map of the modern city. 'It is, in fact, comparatively easy to evoke a picture of England as a whole,' he asserted: an image of 'a certain green island familiar in its backward tilt towards the shores of Europe.' It was 'still easier, perhaps, to think of this world as a green orange revolving round a candle.' But even the most enthusiastic geographer would fail to encompass London with such an image – no one could conceive of a similar 'map of London.' 'For England is a small island, the world is infinitesimal amongst the planets', Ford wrote, 'but London is illimitable.'[89]

Ford acknowledged a further problem of representation: that London life could not satisfactorily be encompassed in any single narrative. He wrote of his feelings of melancholy, occasioned by looking out at London from the window of a moving train:

> the constant succession of much smaller happenings that one sees, and that one never sees completed, gives to looking out of train windows a touch of pathos and of dissatisfaction. It is akin to the sentiment ingrained in humanity of liking a story to have an end. And it is the "note" of all roads into London […] It arises out of the innate altruism that there is in us all, or out of the universal desire to "know".[90]

The choice of a train window from which to make this observation is significant: not only does the pace of life in London bewilder the observer with its restless motion, but it also refuses to allow the observer a stable vantage point from which to narrate it.[91] In D. H. Lawrence's *The White Peacock,* too, London is a city that resists the consolations of narrative closure and defies attempts at synthesis. Whilst Cyril Beardsall finds himself at home amid the 'complex mesh' and 'intermingling' of urban life, his friend and fellow rural-urban

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[88] Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), p.3.
[89] Ford, pp.15-16.
[90] Ford, pp.61-2.
[91] Freeman, p.86.

migrant, George Temple, finds himself in a state of depressive malaise. Cyril observes of George that he seemed to

> shrink from the enormous unintelligible lettering of the poem of London. The town was too large for him, he could not take in its immense, its stupendous poetry. What did come home to him was its flagrant discords. The unintelligibility of the vast city made him apprehensive, and the crudity of its big, coarse contrasts wounded him unutterably.[92]

For George, the assimilation of the contrasts and excitements of London leads only to an image of existential nothingness: 'you feel awful, like a vacuum, with a pressure on you, a sort of pressure of darkness, and you yourself – just nothing, a vacuum […] all loose in the middle of a space of darkness, that's pressing on you.'[93]

These kinds of singular images were, perhaps, at the very centre of anxieties about how to represent the pace and scale of the modern industrial city. If one was inclined to connect – to encompass all the discords and discontinuities of the city, as well as its fevered hurry; to incorporate the currents of upper-class decadence as well as the miseries of urban poverty; to elide the centripetal spreading of the city with its centrifugal pull; and to assimilate all these into a single, metaphoric image – then the master-image one was likely to be left with was often one of black and muddy chaos, of the meaningless whirl of a society spinning away from its moorings. Forster's rallying call to 'only connect', representative of the humane ambitions of so many cultural commentators and novelists, carried with it, too, worrying implications. In *Howards End,* diversity itself becomes meaningless, as the separate and distinct 'many-coloured efforts' of individuals meld into a 'universal grey.'[94] The mental habit of connection aimed to resolve anxieties of disunity, but it also created anxieties of its own out of the totalising images it produced.

Aestheticising the City: Flâneurs and Flâneuses

For many observers of urban life, the speed, energy and dynamism of the modern industrial city was a cause for celebration and a source of excitement. The same sense of restlessness

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[92] D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock* (1911; London: Penguin, 1987), p.366.
[93] Lawrence, p.368.
[94] Forster, p.121.

and hurry that could be so anxiety inducing for some was for others suggestive of liberation, intoxication and adventure. The beauty of urban scenes could be revelatory. Whilst for Reginald Bray and Charles Masterman the man-made surroundings of the city limited the town child's knowledge of any apprehension of order, or sense of wider reality, for one autobiographer the vastness and magnificence of London's architecture produced a sense of transcendental revelation. Frank Goss remembered his first trip from a London suburb to the city centre in terms of the 'floodgates' of his childhood mind-world being thrown open: 'the scene revealed to me was the greater and wider reality outside my own street.' Goss wrote that 'this revelation came to me' as he walked out onto London Bridge: 'it was a sunny morning and waves upon waves of colour and movement flashed into the scene. In that moment a new mind was born for me, overlaying with a vast coloured mantle the make-believe mind of childhood.'[95] Then came, too, the 'revelation of beauty which had flooded over me on my first seeing the Thames from Tower Bridge, the views up and down the river from Westminster Bridge with the towering pinnacles of the Houses of Parliament dominating the scene.'[96] Whilst, for Kathleen Woodward's elderly friend, experience of the 'greater and wider reality' of London had been disorientating and anxiety inducing, for Goss the spectacle produced a sense of wonder – a welcome adventure into a vast and exciting new world.

Rural-urban migrants, entering the city for the first time, often wrote of the overwhelming sense of freedom and opportunity that they experienced amid the bustle of urban life. Henry Snell, the child of agricultural workers in a Nottinghamshire village, wrote of his move to London as a young man:

> The warmer temper and the busier life of the metropolis helped to create in me the feeling that a new, and perhaps kindlier, chapter in my life had begun. Removed from the old environment I felt a refreshing sense of relief. […] The spell which London put upon me was immediate and decisive[.].[97]

Working-class autobiographers frequently found a sense of romance in urban scenes, and remarked on the beauty of street life.[98] Romantic vocabulary, conventionally used to describe

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[95] Goss, pp.79-81.
[96] Goss, p.83.
[97] Henry Snell, *Men, Movements and Myself* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1936), p.69.
[98] Manny Shinwell, for example, wrote of his childhood visits to Petticoat Lane Market: 'as a boy the Lane was to me, despite the dirt, the noise, the squalor and the crowds, exiting, even romantic'. Manny Shinwell, *Lead with the Left: My First Ninety-six Years* (London: Cassell Ltd, 1981), p.7.

the mythic or folkloric rural past, could be co-opted by autobiographers in their descriptions of modern urban life – which the romantic imagination might conventionally have designated as disenchanted. James Whittaker remembered 'brilliant shafts of soft golden light' penetrating the tenements of Edinburgh's Canongate slum, 'gilding the tall ancient "lands"': 'sunny Canongate, with its tall, black houses and its perpetual charming air of soft mystery'.[99] This sense of enchantment in the city, of the mysterious play of light and shadow in urban scenes, is common in autobiographies. Winifred Till remembered walking through a London street market on a winter's evening: 'over each barrow was a paraffin flare that hissed and spluttered but cast a mellow, yellow light over everything. It seemed like magic to me.'[100]

Indeed, autobiographers generally reserve such aestheticised descriptions for scenes of the city by night, as if the city took on a different aspect after darkness fell on the quotidian activities of workplace and labour. Kathleen Woodward wrote of the view from her slum housing that, whilst 'less lovely in the garish light of day', 'at night in the dark the canal took on a gaunt sighing beauty, the cranes on the wharf-side starkly silhouetted'.[101] Lynda Nead has written of Victorian literature of the night-side of London that it was 'always linked with the idea of the flight from the familiar, everyday existence of the daytime city.' In novels and poetry of the period, 'the rhythmic alteration of light and dark', as gaslit illumination gave way to fog and shadow, conveyed both the dream-like attractions of the city-at-night and nightmarish fears of urban danger, depravity and disorder.[102] This latter element of threat is notably absent from the accounts of working-class autobiographers, who, able to wander the streets at night without the class anxieties of bourgeois observers of urban life, focused instead upon humanised images of nocturnal activity, and the seductive beauty of nighttime scenes.

In particular, this was an aesthetic mode available to working-class women observers. Deborah Nord has written of the 'impossibility of the *flâneuse* or female spectator'. For middle-class women writers, walking city streets highlighted the 'vulnerability of the female

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[99] James Whittaker, *I, James Whittaker* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1934), pp.28 and 58.

[100] Winifred Till, *The Early Years of a Victorian Grandmother,* TS, 2:763, Burnett Archive, p.16.

[101] Woodward, pp.28-9.

[102] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.102-6. See also Wolfgang Schivelbusch *Disenchanted Night: The industrialisation of light in the nineteenth century* (Oxford: Berg, 1988) for further discussion of the pleasures and dangers of the city at night.

observer, emphasisng 'her own suspect status as both street walker and woman writer.' Nord writes: 'associated by gender with the very emblems of poverty, disease, and fallenness in urban panoramas created by novelists and social reformers' women writers found themselves contending with split identities at street level: 'they wrote with the cultural (and class) authority of the writer and with the taint of their sex's role in the urban drama.'[103] Deborah Parsons writes similarly that women writers' 'highly self-conscious awareness of themselves as walkers and observers of the modern city' produced a particular mode of female urban vision.[104] In Amy Levy's novel, *The Romance of a Shop,* for instance, the protagonist Gertrude harbours a 'secret, childish love for the gas-lit street, for the sight of the hurrying people, the lamps, the hansom cabs, flickering in and out of the yellow haze, like so many fire-flies'.[105] For Nord, Levy articulated through Gertrude the impossibility of being a flâneuse, as middle-class women were able only to experience the city streets at night at a safe remove: 'we most often see [Gertrude] gazing longingly and lovingly at the street from her window, able to relish the "London pageant" only in the safe position of hidden spectator, of voyeur, seeing but not being seen.'[106] Indeed, Levy returned throughout her writing to elevated perspectives from which to observe the 'pageant' of city streets at a safe distance. In her poem 'Ballade of an Omnibus', the poet's eye observes 'the human tale of love and hate,/ The city pageant' from the top deck of an omnibus: a perspective which enables the observer herself to be 'untroubled by desire.'[107]

Nord argues of women writers of the late Victorian city that 'their experience of singleness and vulnerability inspired a new urban vision, with women struggling to become subject and observer rather than object and observed.'[108] Yet this was also a period in which new freedoms of independent movement, and new opportunities for social investigation and female intellectual community were becoming available to middle-class women in London. The novelist Margaret Harkness, for instance, drew on her own experiences of living and working in the East End with her cousin Beatrice Webb to create a portrait of a 'new urban

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[103] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.12.

[104] Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.6 and 15-16.

[105] Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1889), p.10.

[106] Nord *Walking the Victorian Streets*, pp.201-2.

[107] Amy Levy, 'Ballade of an Omnibus', in *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1890).

[108] Nord, '"Neither Pairs nor Odd": Female Community in late Nineteenth-Century London', *Signs,* 15 (4), (1990), p.736.

type in the novel of city life': 'the consciousness of the middle-class woman who discovers the life of the city and its slums.'[109] Women writers of urban life thus reveal a highly ambivalent relationship to femininity: Harkness' slum novels and Webb's social investigation both displayed an awareness of the gendered dynamics of urban observation, and strove to adopt an "objective" male intellectual stance (indeed, Harkness wrote under the pen name 'John Law', suggestive of masculine authority and impartiality). Nord writes perceptively that the adoption of a male intellectual persona, 'whether as a tool of social investigation or a mode of poetic disguise', itself represented a defence against vulnerability: it was 'a method of self-camouflage and protection in the urban scene.'[110]

Yet female working-class autobiographers were able to participate in walking city streets without either a sense of marginality and transgression, or sexualised anxieties about female vulnerability in the urban crowd that constrained middle-class women. Winifred Till, for example, was able to observe the flickering lights of paraffin lamps in a street market without any sense of self-consciousness of threat or vulnerability: 'As you walked down its length […] it became a little grimier and a little noisier […] I found the noise and bustle very exciting.'[111] As Grace Foakes noted, working-class women were habituated since childhood to the freedom of exploring the urban environment at leisure: 'we grew up with the streets as our playground.'[112] Foakes wrote of wandering a London street market both in terms of consuming a sensory pageant, and of being at ease amid friendly crowds:

> Apples, polished until they shone; bright golden oranges arranged in pyramids; slices of tempting pineapple; pomegranates; purple and green grapes; bright red tomatoes: all these made a wonderful feast of colour against the dreary background of grey. Added to this were the loud and cheerful voices of the costermongers as they shouted and called to each passer-by.[113]

Working-class women observers of the urban landscape were able to write of their experience of street life precisely from this dual position of belonging, and 'seeing without being seen.'

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[109] Nord, 'Female Community', pp.745-6.
[110] Nord, 'Female Community', p. 754.
[111] Till, p.16
[112] Grace Foakes, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood,* in *My Part of the River: Memories of people and places in the East End of Edwardian London*, (London: Futura, 1988), p.30.
[113] Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River* (London, Shepheard-Walwyn, 1974), p.2.

The diarist W. N. P. Barbellion, moving to London from a provincial town, displayed a kind of Baudelairean relish at the vastness and destructive energies of the modern city: 'I like everything that is swift and immense: London, lightning, Popocatapetl.'[114] Entering the city by train, he wrote that he

> gloated over the fact that the train was dashing along the rails to London bearing me and all the rest of the train's company upon their pursuits – wealth, fame, learning. I was inebriated with the speed, ferocity, and dash of living. […] If the train had charged into the buffers I should have hung my head out of the window and cheered.[115]

This sense of intoxication with the dangers of the city, of a kind of romanticising of menace, is also to be found in Decadent poetry and prose of the period. Decadent writers celebrated the 'dark side' of urban life and the very artificiality of the modern industrial city, cultivating images of aestheticised morbidity and decay. In a prologue poem to his first volume of poetry, *Days and Nights,* Arthur Symons rebuked the lofty, pastoral ambitions of nineteenth-century art, and called for aesthetic focus to be brought down from 'some far peak' and into the centre of metropolitan energies:

> go where cities pour
> Their turbid human stream through street and mart,
> A dark stream flowing onward evermore
> Down to an unknown ocean;– there is Art.

For Symons and other writers, it was the very pathology of urban energies that should be aesthetically celebrated: the Decadent artistic imagination 'stands amidst the tumult' of the city, reading 'hearts self-closed against the light'; 'ruthless', it 'probes an ancient wound, yet brings no balm'.[116]

Yet such evocations of urban life were not restricted to the morbid probings of a dark wound: the city could be portrayed as an intoxicating flood of sense impressions. If London could not be apprehended objectively, then poets such as Symons could focus on a more

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[114] W. N. P. Barbellion [pseud], *The Journal of a Disappointed Man,* (1919; London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p.95.
[115] Barbellion, p.129.
[116] Arthur Symons, 'Prologue', *Days and Nights* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1889), p.2.

subjective and ephemeral form of urban knowledge, cultivating the city as a spectacle or a stylised art-object.[117] Decadent poets were greatly influenced by the critic Walter Pater in their representations of London. Pater envisaged visual perception as a kind of whirlpool, a perpetual flood of sense impressions, in the face of which the individual must develop a quickened, discerning consciousness and a sensitivity towards fleeting moments of beauty.[118] Of course, this was a philosophy of self-conscious avant-gardes. Social commentators such as Masterman focussed on anxious assessments of the 'whirlpool' of modern urban life because they were concerned with 'normality' and mass experiences: the fear that working- and lower-middle-class urbanites would be 'sucked', unawares, into the psychological grip of the modern city. Yet for aesthetes, artists and high-cultural critics, whose aim was precisely *not* to cultivate predictable or quotidian modes of experience, the 'whirlpool' could be embraced without anxiety, through the agency of their own aestheticised perception.

Such a philosophy provided a means of recovering a sense of the aesthetic amid the flux, pace and chaotic nature of life in the modern city. Much of Symons' London poetry thus focused on the transient, flickering moments of beauty in urban life. His imagery is of light and shade, of fluid movement: 'The dim wet pavement lit irregularly/ With shimmering streaks of gaslight, faint and frayed.'[119] Or of:

> …the Embankment with its lights,
> The pavement glittering with fallen rain, […]
> The river shook with wavering gleams, […]
> A bright train flashed with all its squares
> Of warm light where the bridge lay mistily.[120]

The aim was that, taken together, a series of fleeting impressions and briefly glimpsed scenes would convey a wider, unseen sense of the city; that scattered facts could take on a metaphoric significance.[121]

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[117] Freeman, p.142.
[118] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.118-121.
[119] Symons, 'A Winter Night', *Days and Nights,* p.97.
[120] Arthur Symons, 'Nocturne', *Silhouettes* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), p.63.
[121] G. Robert Stange, 'The Frightened Poets', in H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities,* vol. 2, p.491, and William B. Thesing, *The London Muse: Victorian Poetic Responses to the City* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1982), p.176.

Impressionist poetry and prose 'word paintings' also focused upon evocations of fleeting detail amid the hurry of urban life. Nicholas Freeman notes that 'the London of realist fiction seldom moved more quickly than a cab horse, but impressionist writing proved more willing to address the sensation of speed.'[122] W. E. Henley's *London Voluntaries,* for example, recorded impressions of the city from the saddle of a horse riding swiftly through the London night:

> Forth from the dust and din,
> The crush, the heat, the many-spotted glare,
> The odour and sense of life and lust aflare,
> The wrangle and jangle of unrests, […]
> Through street and square, through street,
> Each with his home-grown quality of dark
> And violated silence, loud and fleet[.][123]

In other sections of the poem, specific sights and sounds of London are depicted in minute detail; musical directions – *andante con moto, scherzando, allegro maëstoso* – are provided at the head of each section, guiding the reader through the fluctuating rhythms of the metropolis as the poet's eye roves from the Thames Embankment to Trafalgar Square and thence on to a totalising image of London in its entirety. William Thesing notes that this 'blend of painting and music' in these fluid depictions of detail lends to the overarching structure of *London Voluntaries* a quality at once 'that of a symphony and a mural.'[124] Symons wrote glowingly of Henley's synaesthetic and transitory aesthetic that it was 'the art of modernity in verse.'[125]

Whilst decadent and impressionist poetry and prose focused on subjective detail and the flow of sense impressions in the metropolis in order to convey the dynamism, fluidity and speed of the modern city, within the visual arts impressionist representations of London eschewed detail and the particular. Paintings by impressionist artists often veiled the city's apparent complexities in a haze of London fog. In the middle of the nineteenth century, painters such as W. P. Frith had created hugely popular tableaux of urban life: realist panoramas of life in the industrial city. His most famous painting, *The Railway Station*

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[122] Freeman, p.145.
[123] W. E. Henley, *London Voluntaries, The Song of the Sword and Other Verses* (London: David Nutt, 1893), pp.3-4.
[124] Thesing, pp.180-85.
[125] Arthur Symons, 'Mr Henley's Poetry', originally printed in the *Fortnightly Review* (August 1892), quoted in Freeman, p.25.

[Figure 3], is Dickensian in scope, depicting the social diversity of urban space, but to modern eyes it seems static and staged. During the late nineteenth century, realist painting was increasingly considered to be unable to portray the pace, complexity and fluidity of modern urban life.

[Figure 4] William Powell Frith, *The Railway Station* (1862), Royal Holloway, University of London.

From the 1870s onwards, impressionists such as Whistler and Monet dispensed with realist attempts to convey the particularities of London, concerning themselves instead with atmospheric evocation [Figures 5 and 6]. Such paintings were atmospheric both in the literal and metaphorical sense, with London represented as a depopulated city of fog, coal smoke and parti-coloured sunsets. Monet wrote of his representations of London fog that the 'regular, massive blocks' of the city's architecture became 'grandiose in this mysterious cloak'.[126] Freeman writes of Whistler's use of outline and shadow that it offered 'a more fluid and less didactic reality' than that of realist forms of representation. Impressionism thus offered a means of escaping the 'impasse' of urban realism, 'where insufficient detail led to an unconvincing milieu but where too much caused narrative to grind to a halt' in a morass of 'clutter.'[127]

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[126] Claude Monet, quoted in Freeman, p.132.
[127] Freeman, pp.107-8.

[Figure 5] James Abbot McNeill Whistler, *The Thames, Evening* (c.1886), Stockport Heritage Services.

And yet, as with decadent poetry, these representations of the city conveyed a very particular form of urban knowledge, centred on the aesthetic, and especially the individual's perception of the aesthetic. People – the actual inhabitants of the city – rarely featured in impressionist representations of London; if they did, merely appearing as blots on a canvas. This 'systematic depopulation' of London in impressionist art perhaps indicates a latent unease towards the urban population – or, at the least, an inability to aestheticise the urban masses. Literary and artistic impressionism, which aimed towards the atmospheric evocation of the 'sense' of the city as a whole, thus created a very circumscribed aesthetic of urban life – as Freeman writes, 'being tied to areas that offered congenial views without the

intervention of teeming humanity. […] Areas of the metropolis that offered little visual stimulus were ignored', thus offering only a highly selective 'version' of London.[128]

[Figure 6] Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge, Gray Weather* (1900), Art Institute of Chicago IL.

There is an element of Paterian aesthetics in this too. Pater wrote that 'experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced.'[129] There is a kind of solipsism, and an essential loneliness to these impressionistic forms of urban knowledge – individuals may apprehend beauty in urban life, yet each individual's subjectivity remains fundamentally detached from that of other urban inhabitants. There is a kind of amorality, too, to this mode of urban perception, detached from the social realities of the city. Thomas Hardy, for instance, was critical of aestheticising the polluted London atmosphere, noting how 'those marvellous sunset effects' of London afternoons were actually 'made up of kitchen coal-

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[128] Freeman, p.134.
[129] Pater, p.119.

smoke and human and animal exhalations.'[130] Arthur Symons, in an uncharacteristic moment of reflection upon the moral responsibility of art, mused that 'those sordid splendours of smoke and dirt which may be so fine as aspects, mean something which we can only express by the English word squalor; they mean the dishumanising of innumerable people.'[131]

At stake, in these aestheticised depictions of urban life, was the question of meaning. In a particularly severe assessment of the kind of literary impressionism practiced by Symons, the poet Lionel Johnson wrote that

> Symons is a slave to impressionism, whether the impression be precious or not. A London fog, the blurred, tawny lamplights, the red omnibus, the dreary rain, the depressing mud, the glaring gin-shop, the slatternly shivering women: three dexterous stanzas telling you that and nothing more.[132]

Whilst Symons believed that an artistic commitment to capturing the transient details of urban life might convey a wider, unseen sense of the city, his contemporaries were often sceptical about the abilities of decadent and impressionist art to convey any impression of the city that amounted to urban knowledge. In two very different ways, neither a focus upon the minute particularities of urban scenes, nor atmospheric evocations of the 'sense' of the city in its entirety, engaged with the wider social realities of urban life.

Perversity and Iconoclasm

Intoxication with the aestheticised whirl of the modern city could serve as a means of expressing distrust of the social and cultural values of Victorian society. Within the avant-garde, a blending of decadent and impressionist influences signaled an ideological commitment to art-for-art's-sake, and a self-consciously 'modern' spirit. For others, too, a sense of exhilaration amid the energies of urban life was allied to a rejection of social norms and the limiting, disenchanting conventions of bourgeois respectability. D. H. Lawrence is often characterised as a writer who rejected the city in favour of a return to nature, yet –

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[130] Thomas Hardy, *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved and the Well Beloved* (1892-7; London: Penguin, 1997), p.139.
[131] Arthur Symons, 'London: A Book of Aspects', in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* (New York: Brenato's, 1919), p.214.
[132] Letter to Katherine Tynan, quoted in Derek Stanford, *Poets of the '90s* (London: John Baker Publishers Limited, 1965), p.100.

seemingly paradoxically – his characters often find liberation from modern industrial disenchantment in the city as much as in the countryside. In *The White Peacock,* despite his intense nostalgia for the rural pleasures of Nethermere, Cyril Beardsall finds aesthetic rapture and delight amid the fluid activity of London scenes, which are conveyed through metaphors of organic intoxication:

> The spring came bravely, even in south London, and the town was filled with magic. I never knew the sumptuous purple of evening till I saw the round arc-lamps fill with light, and roll like golden bubbles along the purple dusk of the high road. Everywhere at night the city is filled with the magic of lamps: over the river they pour in golden patches their floating luminous oil on the restless darkness; the bright lamps float in and out of the cavern of London Bridge Station like round shining bees in and out of a black hive [...] my attention roved like a bee which clambers drunkenly among blue flowers. I became intoxicated with the strange nectar which I sipped out of the eyes of passers-by.[133]

Symons, too, advocated an aesthetic imagination that encompassed the beauty of the city as well as of the countryside, and which admitted 'no distinction between what is called the work of nature and what is the work of men.'[134]

Yet, at times, one detects in the period's literature a measure of iconoclasm, of willful perversity, even of contrarianism, in an imagination that professes to find itself only at home amid the artificiality of the city; to find nature tiresome and uninteresting, and to savour even the ugliness and squalor of the urban environment. Symons wrote, entirely reasonably, of his poetic preference for London: 'I am always charmed to read beautiful poems about nature in the country. Only personally, I prefer town to country.'[135] William Thesing notes that in Symons' earlier poetry, at least, 'nature and artifice *are* balanced. For every poem that celebrates the scent of a spring blossom, there is a corresponding one that celebrates the scent of an exotic perfume.'[136] Yet Symons was also prone to sweepingly anti-pastoral statements of an unequivocal nature, that seem to contradict his own prescription to treat the worlds of nature and artifice just the same: 'everything in the country, except the sea, bored me.'[137] A measure of this self-conscious contrarianism can be found in his poem 'Violet', in which

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[133] Lawrence, p.341.
[134] Arthur Symons, 'London: A Book of Aspects', p.199.
[135] Arthur Symons, 'Preface to the Second Edition of *Silhouettes:* Being a Word on Behalf of Patchouli', in *The Collected Works of Arthur Symons,* vol.1 (London: Martin Secker, 1924), pp.95-7.
[136] Thesing, p.178.
[137] Arthur Symons, 'A Prelude to Life', in *The Collected Works of Arthur Symons: Spiritual Adventures,* vol.5 (London, Martin Secker, 1924), pp.31-2.

Symons, in Baudelairean vein, asserted that he preferred the artificial attractions of hot-house orchids to 'the mere violets of the wood' – which, 'For all their sweetness, have not the power to move/ The curiosity that moves my blood.' And yet, upon finding a violet growing between the 'painted slips' of hot-house flowers, where 'the flowers forget/ How the sun shines, and how the cool winds blow […] Where only nature is a thing unreal', Symons decides that he does indeed like violets after all, having found 'the artificial flower of my ideal.'[138] There is an implicit assumption of intellectual superiority in Symons' explanation of his aesthetic preference: the 'dainty' flowerings of woodland violets are 'sweet', to be sure, but his is an imagination too powerfully curious to be satisfied by the mediocrities of natural prettiness. A taste for artificial blooms and an atmosphere cut off from the light of the sun and the open air, it is implied, suggests connoisseurship, and a more discerning eye.

The reader also detects an allusion to another of Symons' favourite themes: that of his captivation with the artificial, corrupted beauty of urban prostitutes and dancers (etiolated complexions, painted lips, rouged cheeks, and the bottled scent of patchouli) over the predictable banalities of English-Rose prettiness. [139] Critics responded censoriously to Symons' treatment of prostitution, not least because a fascination with urban sexuality figured in his poetry as 'the savour of forbidden things'. Thesing writes of Symons' critics that they took issue not with 'the presentation of urban material, but because of his nonchalant attitude towards the seamier side of urban experience.'[140] Again, there is a kind of amorality to this mode of urban perception, in that it celebrates the aesthetic 'interestingness' of urban poverty and deprivation – the squalid garrets and sordid rooms of prostitutes half-forgotten by the society in which they live. This amorality is visible in *The White Peacock,* too. As recent critics of the novel have commented, Cyril's aestheticised metaphors of London arise from a need to grasp his experience of the city as a totality, 'but only in so far as he can create his *own* life out of it. And […] he is happiest when creating a verbal life which has nothing at all to do with the lives other people actually live.'[141] Cyril is ostensibly fascinated with the men and women who people the streets of London, but his fascination concerns urban inhabitants as aesthetic objects. In another passage, the characters observe of the city:

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[138] Arthur Symons, 'Lilian', *London Nights* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1895), p.9.
[139] For example Symons, 'Being a Word on Behalf of Patchouli', pp.95-7.
[140] Thesing, p.197.
[141] Graham Holderness, *D. H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 1982), quoted in John Worthen, 'Introduction', in D. H Lawrence, *The White Peacock* (1911; London: Penguin, 1987, pp.30-1.

> Were we not in the midst of the bewildering pageant of modern life, with all its confusions of bannerets and colours, with its infinite interweaving of sounds, the screech of the modern toys of haste striking like keen spray, the heavy boom of busy mankind gathering its bread, earnestly, forming the bed of other sounds; and between these two the swiftness of songs, the triumphant tilt of the joy of life, the hoarse oboes of privation, the shuddering drums of tragedy, and the eternal scraping of the two deep-toned strings of despair?[142]

Here, human suffering is merely a series of discordant notes amid the fascinating music of London: the joy as well as the tragedy of human life is merely a spectacle, a sensory 'pageant' of light and sound to be consumed for the individual's own enjoyment.

W. N. P. Barbellion, for one, acknowledged in retrospect the moral implications of a desire to move beyond the confines of suburban social conventions, and to imitate Baudelaire in a celebration of the darkly animalistic energies of urban life. Living and working in London as a young man, yet suffering from multiple sclerosis and confined for periods of time to his lodgings, Barbellion often wrote of his desire to immerse himself in the whirl and activity of London streets. In June 1914, after a long passage in which he rhapsodised about his fascination with the destructive energies at work in the metropolis, he concluded: 'all bonfires are delectable. Civilisation and top hats bore me. My own life is like a tame rabbit's. If only I had a long tail to lash it in feline rage! I would return to Nature – I could almost return to Chaos. There are times when I feel so dour I would wreck the universe if I could.' In an annotation written in 1917, he added poignantly: 'I think after three years of Armageddon I feel quite ready to go back to top hats and civilisation.'[143]

The Soul of London

Whilst decadent and impressionist evocations of London attempted to represent the metropolis through either a focus on the general or the particular, travel writing and the burgeoning genre of 'London literature' alternated between microscopic and macroscopic focus, moving from intricate descriptions of individual buildings and streets to evocations of the 'spirit', 'sense', or 'character' of the metropolis as a whole. Ford Madox Ford's *The Soul*

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[142] Lawrence, p.360.
[143] Barbellion, pp.129-30.

of London, a work of sociological impressionism, combined discussion of London's history and topography with accounts of walking through city streets, evocations of fleeting moments in his experience of London, and an attempt, in Ford's words, to '"get the atmosphere" of modern London'.[144] Whilst the realist perspective of social commentators tended to reinforce anxieties about the impossibility of representing London, an impressionistic focus relieved social observers of the tension between generalisation and the systematic or exhaustive cataloguing of detail.

London could be apprehended through creative synaesthesia, and a mixing of metaphors. Just as the narrator of Wells' *Tono-Bungay* envisaged London as composed of movements in a symphony, and *The White Peacock's* Cyril saw the elements of urban life as instruments in an orchestra, for Ford, too, London could be understood in terms of musicality: 'its essential harmony is not to be caught by any human ear. It can only be treated as a ground bass, a drone, on top of which one pipes one's own small individual melody.'[145] He likened the confusion of sense impressions in the metropolis to an Impressionist canvas: scenes appeared 'wetted, fused and confused in their outlines, beneath a weeping sky in which the drapery of clouds had the look of a badly blotted water-colour painting, still wet and inefficient.'[146] This blending of painterly and musical metaphors runs throughout *The Soul of London*: he wrote of his imaginative desire to conceive of London as an image

> of a city, in a plain, dominated by a great building, bounded by a horizon, brought into composition by mists, great shadows, great clouds or by a bright and stippled foreground. [But] It is trite enough to say that the dominant note of [one's] first impression will be that of [one's] own alone-ness. It is none the less the dominant note of London.[147]

Such an approach was not far removed from the synaesthesia of decadent and impressionist poetry, with its evocations of the lights, sounds and smells of London, and its aim of a synthesis of experience and expression through a Paterian attempt to 'paint in music'.[148]

Yet Ford's aesthetic treatment of the metropolis is interwoven with an understanding of the city's human element, and an attempt to reconcile his own rapture at the dynamism of

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[144] Ford, p.xii.
[145] Ford, pp.xi-xii.
[146] Ford, p.69.
[147] Ford, p.7.
[148] See also discussion of creative synaesthesia in Freeman, p.96.

London with an awareness of the realities of other human lives. The book can be read as an attempt to find an aestheticised mode of perception that did not blind itself to the diversity of human experience, and the existence of human suffering. In other writings, Ford was critical of contemporary attempts to retreat from metropolitan cosmopolitanism in favour of the nostalgic appeal of the countryside. He wrote disdainfully of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Movement, a movement which Ford understood to 'withdraw the population into small knots', that it embodied 'a spirit that is narrow and provincial'.[149] Throughout *The Soul of London,* Ford refused to accept the consolations of an easy answer to the problems of urban life. In a long passage, he considered the attractions of the city for rural-urban migrants seeking industrial employment. From the outside, London first has the appearance and the 'magnetic attraction' of an 'immense gambling table' in which fortunes were to be made. But, entering the city, the rural-urban migrant is soon robbed of 'that tremulous and romantic idea', as London is revealed to be the scene of 'a hard and almost unceasing struggle, with the pay proportionately worse, with the hours really longer because the work is so much more strenuous.' But people nonetheless stay – they very rarely return to the countryside. Why, Ford asks. In theory, the pleasures of London are more exciting, but surely one can see little of it from inside a factory all day? Yet he recalled a conversation with a factory worker, who thought the author a fool for not understanding the allure of London for the working classes, and he reconsidered that 'it seemed to offer romantically, not streets paved with gold but streets filled with leisure, streets where we shall saunter, things for the eye to rest on in a gray and glamorous light, books to read, men to be idle with, women to love.'[150]

For Ford, the multiplicity of human life in London attained, at times, the status of the sublime. He wrote that to experience London in the stillness of 'a faint, saffron dawn' was to enter 'some realm of the half supernatural'. The atmosphere hung softly, 'with an air of mystery as of an unsuspected population revealed unawares. […] The thought of all these countless thousands lying invisible, with their souls, in sleep, parted from their bodies – all these things give an effect, in its silence, immense, stealthy, and overpowering.'[151]

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[149] Ford Madox Ford, 'The Future in London' (1909), in S. J Stang (ed), *The Ford Madox Ford Reader* (London: Paladin, 1986), pp.209 and 302.
[150] Ford, pp.109-10.
[151] Ford, pp.56-7.

For all this, Ford's rapture at the illimitable beauty of London was tinged with 'pathos' as well as 'poetry', and a melancholy sense that 'any human achievement bulks very small.'[152] His writings are infused with a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity of each individual, and the complex emotional lives of the urban 'masses' – something that will be explored in chapter five. Ford noted that in 'this landscape of roofs', there were 'so many human lives, so much endeavour, so many human hopes. […] And for me at least it is melancholy to think that hardly one of all these lives, of all these men, will leave any trace in the world.'[153] There is a sense that human lives themselves dissolve into the immensity and fluidity of London. Ford wrote that in 'a really ideal book' about the city, 'there would be conveyed the idea that all these human beings melt, as it were, into the tide of humanity as all these vapours melt into the overcast skies.'[154]

The tension between celebrations of the beauty of the city and the less congenial actualities of its 'human element' were frequently at stake in aestheticised representations of urban life. Implicit in artistic attempts to aestheticise the city, as well as the cultural debates that surrounded them, was the constant tension between the individual's enjoyment of urban life and the wider reality of urban social problems. Artistic attempts to engage with urban subject matter could appear to be simply art-for-art's sake: a way of seeing that was divested of any wider social meaning or moral responsibility, and failed to engage with the social realities of the city or the lived experience of its poorer inhabitants (or, indeed, an unwholesome and even immoral savouring of an aesthetic predicated upon urban poverty and deprivation). Yet art that failed to take the city as its subject matter was seen more and more to fail to engage with an increasingly significant part of modern experience. To ignore the pervasive fact of mass urbanism and restrict artistic representation to the pastoral was also to fail to engage with social reality. In an 1881 speech, delivered in Middlesbrough (a town not greatly aestheticised even among cultural celebrants of urbanism) on 'The Rise and Strength of Great Towns', the radical politician James Cowen rebuked 'those who can only detect beauty in pastoral and primitive pursuits, those who can only find sentiment in struggling streams and dreary sunsets.' Cowen suggested that 'those who dipped below the surface' of the modern industrial city would find there

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[152] Ford, p.11.
[153] Ford, p.60.
[154] Ford, p.xii.

a mighty poem of moving human interest in those bellowing blast-furnaces and grimy workshops. They are carving out of raw materials the means of social elevation, amelioration and enjoyment. They are breaking down old asperities, indefinitely adding to the usefulness of existence, linking town to town [...] and binding all classes in the rough but genial poetry of real life.[155]

For Cowen, it was precisely the human activity of the urban working classes that should be the source of aesthetic celebration.

A Return to Pessimism?

Intellectual histories of the city generally view the period as characterised by anti-urban sentiment, identifying a broad move from mid-century optimism about the future of the city to a growing pessimism from the 1880s. In his study of attitudes towards urban society, Andrew Lees writes that 'after several decades during which optimism about the ability of urbanites to surmount their various problems had been in the ascendant, there occurred during the late nineteenth century a reawakening of concern'.[156] Bruce Coleman, too, characterises the period from the 1880s as one in which 'the doubts return.' He argues in *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* that 'by the 1880s the mid-Victorian optimism had evaporated'; 'in the early 1880s the prevailing mood changed to gloom and alarm with surprising suddenness.'[157] More recently, Richard Dennis has described these attitudes as 'chasmic', in which late Victorian cities were characterised by assessments of 'social failure'.[158]

This understanding of the period as characterised by anti-urban sentiment is based on a relatively small body of intellectual sources: writers who took a somewhat Olympian view of the urban population, and whose claims to objective knowledge of the emotional condition of England were often based on a set of assumptions about social change. Writing of the First

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[155] Joseph Cowen, 'The Rise and Strength of Great Towns', in Evan Rowland Jones, *The Life and Speeches of Joseph Cowen, M. P.* (London: S. Low, 1885), pp.428-9.
[156] Lees, p.106.
[157] Bruce Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp 10 and 168.
[158] Dennis continues: 'even the modest improvements the Victorians attempted' were envisaged to have been 'counterproductive, as the impetus to improvement succumbed to the pressures of rational calculation and laissez-faire economics'. Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.31-2.

Industrial Revolution, Emma Griffin has taken this historiographical current to task, criticising historians for interpreting the social and cultural effects of industrialisation in much the same way as the intellectuals who lived through it. By examining popular attitudes as expressed in working-class autobiographical writing, she argues, a very different picture often emerges.[159] Indeed, working-class autobiographers often inverted the paradigm of a return to pessimism from the 1880s, contrasting the Dickensian squalor and deprivation of mid-century cities to the technological and municipal improvements of the contemporary urban environment. One autobiographer, W. E. Adams, contrasted the London of the 1850s to that at the turn of the twentieth century: 'it had no Thames Embankment, no underground railways, no street trams, no magnificent avenues […] the River Thames was an open sewer.' Yet the building of the Thames Embankment and the sewer system, and the clearing of slums had 'made the metropolis a far sweeter and handsomer city in the twentieth century than it was in the middle of the nineteenth.'[160] James Dunn, who moved to London from a village in the Leicestershire coalfields in the 1850s, saw no halting in the progress of urban improvement: 'what changes have I seen during the fifty years that I have known London. Its population has increased about six-fold, its extent has grown tremendously, its means of transit from point to point, compared with the old methods of travelling, are most marvelous.'[161]

Moreover, the assessments of anxious social commentators themselves complicate the trajectory of a 'return to pessimism' beginning in the 1880s. Charles Masterman contrasted the torpidity of political energies in 1900s to 'those "eighties" that now seem so incredibly distant to us', when public effort, as he saw it, was directed towards the problems of poverty and the possibilities of social reform. He felt that in the 1880s there had been 'a "going" in the air and the noise of movement, filling with the happiest anticipations the minds of those really concerned with the desperate social diseases.'[162] For others, it was the 1890s that marked the beginnings of cultural stagnation: the Conservative politician George Wyndham, for example, asserted in 1907 that 'we live in a phase of indolent mediocrity. I remember the seventies and eighties and declare that this is Autumn; but an Autumn of more mist than

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[159] Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), pp.10-16.
[160] W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom,* vol.2, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1903), pp.310-12.
[161] James Dunn, *From Coal Mine Upwards, Or, 70 years of an eventful life* (London: W. Green, 1910), p.223.
[162] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', p.1.

usual and no mellow fruit.'[163] And for H. G. Wells's George Ponderevo, the autumn of urban and national life did not arrive until the end of the 1900s, and even then presented the appearance of 'an early day in fine October. The hand of change rests on it all, unfelt, unseen; resting for awhile, as it were half reluctantly.'[164]

   Peter Mandler has taken issue with the characterisation of national life in the period as one dominated by anti-urbanism, anti-modernism, and a nostalgic yearning to return to rural modes of existence. Taking the example of Charles Masterman, he writes that whilst during his time in opposition Masterman advocated a vague aim to reconstruct society on the basis of 'some form of yeoman or peasant proprietorship,' in government he accepted the inevitability of mass urbanism. Whilst he continued to lament the fate of the human condition in the modern city, Masterman turned his energies instead towards improving the spiritual condition of urbanites.[165] G. M Trevelyan's contribution to *The Heart of the Empire* (edited by Masterman), an essay on 'Past and Future', expressed a similar sentiment: a return to nature was impossible amid the mass urbanism of the present; contemporary energies should be directed instead towards improving the cities of the future. Though Trevelyan lamented the disappearance of Olde England and the loss of rural modes of life, he insisted that the solution to urban problems lay in 'artificial means'. Indeed, it had been the free play of the 'natural' laws of economy that had created the cities of the present in the first place. The solution to urban problems thus lay in the acceptance of the modern industrial city: 'it can still be made more beautiful [...] but if so it will be by artificial means and by conscious effort of our own. The world [...] having become naturally ugly, must be made artificially beautiful.'[166] Joseph Cowen expressed a more unequivocal optimism in the forces of urban progress during the 1880s. He told his audience in Middlesbrough that 'I have a speaking sympathy with the plaintive wail that Mr. Ruskin and others so often, so touchingly, and so eloquently raise over a vanished and irrecoverable past. But the Fates are against them.' For Cowen, 'in the great battle between movement and stagnation, the cry is ever onward: [...] the towns of which Middlesbrough is a type are the indices of our advance: they record the rise of a nation.'[167]

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[163] Letter to his mother, quoted in Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness", English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Sixth Series, vol.7 (1997), p.165.
[164] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* p.9.
[165] Mandler, p.163.
[166] G. M. Trevelyan, 'Past and Future', in *The Heart of the Empire,* pp.402 and 416-7.
[167] Cowen, p.430.

It seems that what occurred in attitudes towards urban life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was thus not so much a straightforward return to the anxieties of the past, after the brief interlude of mid-Victorian optimism, but an intensifying of ambivalence. And for those who did express anxieties, across a wide range of discourses, there was a widespread consensus that the cities of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period were fundamentally different to the cities of the past; thus the anxieties that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century were correspondingly different in nature to those of earlier periods. The condition of British cities was increasingly seen to represent the state of the nation. As tropes of the 'shock of the city' receded, and urban life came to be considered the norm, anxieties related to the pervasiveness and inescapability of urban life began to emerge. The very imposition of an element of predictability upon urban growth enabled new anxieties to come to the fore: that urban life was an all-encompassing mode of experience, that its grip was psychological as well as physical, and that its complexities transcended individual human comprehension. As will be explored in the following chapter, there is sense, in contemporary thought, that the forces at play in urban growth were so vast, and carried such momentum, that they dwarfed human efforts and were sprawling out of purposive control. And there is, too, a certain weariness in these anxieties: a sense that the kinetic forces at work in the modern industrial city were sapping human energies, leaving cultural stagnation and decay in in their wake.

Chapter Three – 'All that Is Solid Melts into Air': Progress, Modernity and the City

Throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian period, 'modernity' was invoked by contemporary observers across a range of genres in reference to the mental and emotional habitus of urban life. In this distinctively 'modern' structure of feeling, anxieties surrounding urban hurry and speed coexisted not just with rapture and excitement at the modern city, but also with cultural despair, and assessments of modern society as characterised by stagnation, somnolence, lethargy, and a pervasive sense of unreality. Despite the apparent urban improvements, and social and economic progress of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, cultural responses to the modern city displayed a seemingly paradoxical sense of malaise. The writings of social commentators, urban planners and novelists are frequently pervaded by anxieties about disenchantment and meaninglessness in a society increasingly cut off from the beauty of nature and the influences of religion and spirituality.

This was a lethargy and sense of powerlessness quite different from the nervous exhaustion examined in the previous chapter. Whereas the former understood the exhaustion of modern life to result from the relentless pace and bustle of the urban environment, the cultural malaise and despair that will be examined in the following chapter is of a more existential nature. Across a wide range of high-cultural discourses, social commentators, novelists, and cultural critics voiced two, seemingly paradoxical anxieties. Modern life in cities was at once envisaged as exhausting and all consuming, leaving little time or space for spiritual contemplation and the search for more fundamental sources of meaning; and as frenetic and self-willed series of distractions that belied the *ultimate* meaninglessness and disenchantment of the age. At its most extreme, this emotional climate was expressed in the focus of social commentators and novelists upon suicide: that ultimate metaphor and symptom of the putative disillusionment, ennui and anomie of modern times.

The vastness, fluidity and complex energies of the modern city presented an emotional problem to many contemporaries, creating a sense that the individual was 'a very small part of a very vast machine'.[1] As modernity came to be seen as all encompassing, a loss of faith in the individual and of human powers of action seems to have ensued, in which urban problems

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[1] Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast,* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), p.168.

were seen to be self-perpetuating beyond purposive human intervention. Charles Masterman wrote that 'At the commencement of the twentieth century […] in a world-wide disenchantment, the most progressive races of our western civilisation stand as if paralysed before a problem apparently beyond human solution – seeing human action vanishing in a kind of wide and barren marshland.'[2] Western civilisation protested 'a kind of cosmic human weariness. Society which had started on its mechanical advance and the aggrandisement of material goods with the buoyancy of an impetuous life confronts a poverty [both physical and spiritual] which it can neither ameliorate nor destroy'.[3] There is a sense of human effort dwarfed and rendered passive by social and economic processes escalating beyond purposive control. Marshall Berman wrote of modernity that 'the process of development that the creative spirits of the nineteenth century conceived as a great human adventure' became, during the early twentieth century a grim 'life-and-death necessity'.[4] Whilst nineteenth century critics of modern life understood the ways in which modern technology and social organisation determined man's fate, 'they all believed that modern individuals had the capacity both to understand this fate and, once they understood it, to fight it. Hence, even in the midst of a wretched present, they could imagine an open future.' However, critics in the first years of the twentieth century often lacked this 'empathy with, and faith in, their fellow modern men and women […] modern man as a subject – as a living being capable of response, judgment and action in and on the world – has disappeared.'[5]

This was, to a large extent, a diagnosis of a distinctly bourgeois emotional condition. Cultural and intellectual histories that have diagnosed the late Victorian and Edwardian temperament as one of cultural malaise and the breakdown of faith in 'progress' have tended to identify the 'mood' of the period with the rise of literary and artistic modernism, in which modernism is implicated in the rise of a distinctively modern consciousness.[6] Yet to what extent was this rejection of realism and progressivism restricted to *avant-gardes*? The chapter considers the extent to which assessments of the emotional condition of modernity –

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[2] Charles Masterman, 'Realities at Home', in *The Heart of the Empire: Discussion of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907),p.51

[3] Charles Masterman, *In Peril of Change: Essays Written in a Time of Tranquillity* (New York: W. B. Huebsch, 1905), pp.xii-xiii.

[4] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), p.75.

[5] Berman p.27.

[6] For example, Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp.5-23; Malcolm Bradbury and James Macfarlane (eds), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.11 and 19-23; Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.ix and 1-33.

characterised by ennui, cultural malaise, disenchantment, and psychological fragmentation –
were restricted to the anxieties of social elites and the literary intelligentsia. In particular, it
argues that the Romantic critique of the Industrial Revolution remained a powerful
organising principle in which working-class autobiographers writing well into the twentieth
century could situate their life narratives. Yet autobiographers also explicitly reflected on the
insufficiency of traditional narrative forms and genres in articulating their emotional lives;
rural-urban migrants, in particular, expressed a sense of living in multiple and conflicting
temporalities. The chapter also considers sources of enchantment in the modern city, and the
ways in which the imaginative literature of urban life provided a distinctively modern mode
of re-enchantment.[7]

The Nature of Change in Modernity

For Berman, anxiety was central to the condition of modernity itself: the 'characteristic
energies, insights and anxieties' of the modern condition sprung from the competing drives
and strains of economic life in the industrial city. Modernity could be read as 'a mode of vital
experience – experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and
perils'; such experience was predicated on an insatiable desire for growth, a desire to
transform the world, and a terror of disorientation and disintegration, a wish to be rooted in a
stable past.[8] Late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century observers envisaged the nature of
change as at once a teleological process of progressive innovation, and as a destructive,
devouring force that swamped national histories and obliterated old certainties. Berman,
referencing Marx's well-known formulation, conceived of the experience of modernity as
one in which 'all that is solid melts into air', which was engaged in a dialectical relationship
with modernism – the attempt to 'make oneself somehow at home' in modernity, 'to make its
rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of
freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows.'[9] Martin Daunton and Bernhard
Rieger, too, have identified an essential ambivalence at the heart of attitudes towards the

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[7] See, for example Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.3 and 12.
[8] Berman, p.15.
[9] Berman, pp.345-6.

nature of modernity, and anxieties surrounding the contemporary sense of the age as one of transition:

> experiences of change often led to a disorientating sense of transitoriness that the language of the 'modern' was particularly suited to capture. The sense of the instability of modern times hinged on conceptualisations of change, with those who emphasised the creative and positive dimensions of innovation being equally conscious of its destructive aspects. In order to create the new, the old or traditional had to be displaced of destroyed.[10]

However, they note that British assessments of modernity differed from the Continental Western European conceptualisation, in that they 'successfully incorporated notions of gradual evolution rather than irreversible rupture. Put differently, contemporary observers saw British modernity as solidly grounded on historical foundations rather than adrift, without direction, in the present.' Daunton and Rieger see British culture as characterised by efforts to preserve or recapture aspects of the past in order to provide a sense of continuity between past and present, and to underpin future innovation with the groundwork of national tradition.[11]

Richard Dennis has conceptualised these two alternative models for the nature of change in late Victorian and Edwardian assessments of British modernity as 'chasmic' versus 'whiggish'. In the 'chasmic' readings of early twentieth-century social commentators, historians and urban planners (most notably Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford), mid-Victorian cities were envisaged as 'an abyss of neglect and indifference, sharply differentiated from preceding and following periods […] "chasmic", not only in chronological terms, but also socially.' In contrast, the 'whiggish' interpretation of Victorian and Edwardian cities stressed continuity between an early-to-mid nineteenth-century 'age of improvement' and the modern cities of the early twentieth century. Such an interpretation, Dennis writes, 'stressed the progress made by nineteenth-century social reformers, recognising the unprecedented problems with which they were faced.' From this teleological viewpoint, 'even the middle decades of the century were not ones of neglect, but of debate and experiment – a positive and heroic view of a Victorian heyday.'[12]

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[10] Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II,* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), p.7.
[11] Daunton and Rieger, p.11.
[12] Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.31-5.

Yet even amongst those who celebrated the achievements of the present and vaunted the progress and urban improvements of the nineteenth century, there was anxiety surrounding the future direction of urban energies. Lynda Nead has written of late-Victorian representations of London as modern Babylon that it was an essentially paradoxical image: 'It was a place that symbolised material wonder and tumultuous destruction: a city whose splendour was its downfall.' For Nead, London 'was the centre of a highly focused set of representations concerning modernity and urbanisation, but it was a present haunted by the image of ruin. The past threatened constantly to obstruct the project of improvement. More fearful, however, was the image of the ruins of the future'.[13]

Nead writes that modernity should not be understood in terms of a rupture with the past, but should instead be imagined as 'pleated or crumpled time, drawing together past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations.'[14] Stephen Kern makes a related point about the sense of the present in modernity as temporally 'thickened'. Yet, for Kern, at stake was not just the relation of the present to past and future, but the sense, in modernity, of multiple and simultaneous present*s*. New communications technologies such as the telegraph and telephone, as well as faster modes of transport such as the express train and motor car, created a growing sense of unity between people and places formerly isolated at a distance. The scaling down of effective distances shrank in proportion to the expansion of mental horizons, which gave the present a sense of simultaneity – of multiple unfolding presents linked together on a global scale. Kern writes of time sense in modernity:

> The sense of the present was the most distinctively new, thickened temporally with retentions and protentions of past and future and, most important, expanded spatially to create the vast, shared experience of simultaneity. The present was no longer limited to one event in one place, sandwiched tightly between past and future and limited to local surroundings.[15]

Thus there is a sense, in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century thought, of the city as a site of overlapping and intertwining temporalities, in which remnants of the past and visions

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[13] Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.3 and 10.
[14] Nead, p.8.
[15] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.314.

of the future coexisted amid a fluid, transitory and multiple present – each in an uncertain and ambivalent relation to the other. The most explicit expression of this dialectic can be found in H. G. Wells' 'Condition of England' novel, *Tono-Bungay.* The novel exemplifies contemporary debates over the nature of modernity, and uncertainty in the face of social change and urban growth. But it also exemplifies Wells's own private ambivalence towards change, in which his nostalgia for the static and certain world of the Country House System, and the beauty of the countryside, coincided with a fascination with technological change, urban growth, and the bustle and pace of urban life. *Tono-Bungay* advances two alternative models of urban growth, and thus two theories of the nature of change in modernity. The first model envisages urbanisation as an outgrowth of the Country House System. For the young George Ponderevo, the son of a housekeeper in the fictional country house of Bladesover, Bladesover is 'the clue to all England'.[16] 'The great house, the church, the village, and the labourers and the servants in their stations and degrees, seemed to me, I say, to be a closed and complete social system […] I thought this was the order of the whole world.' London appears to George simply as the social organisation of his childhood in a Great House writ large. 'I thought London was only a greater country town where the gentlefolk kept townhouses and did their greater shopping under the magnificent shadow of the greatest of all fine gentlewomen, the Queen. It seemed to be in the divine order'.[17] George's first impressions of London provoke a vision of England in which urban modernity is rooted solidly in national tradition. Urbanisation is envisaged as a process of progressive, developmental change that maintains an essential continuity with English history.

Yet as the novel progresses, George considers the modern city to be governed by an entirely new form of growth, analogous to the radioactive substance Quap. 'There has grown up in me a kind of theory of London', he reflects: 'I do not think I see lines of an ordered structure out of which it has grown, detected a process that is something more than a confusion of casual accidents, though indeed it may be no more than a process of disease.'[18] Urban growth is seen to be entirely ungrounded in traditional forms of social organisation – the Bladesover model has been overtaken by 'blind forces of invasion'. Progress in modernity is unstable, transitory; a growth predicated on decay and destruction. Change seems structureless, purposeless, 'yeasty' – a pathological hypertrophy in which suburban

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[16] Wells, pp.85-6.
[17] Wells, p.8.
[18] Wells, pp.85-6.

sprawl produces an image of cities spreading cancerously into the surrounding countryside.[19] George's ultimate vision of urban modernity is one in which 'a very inconsiderable minority of English people realise how extensively this ostensible order has passed away': the old order remains visible only as a 'lantern show' of dissolving views, in which 'the scene that is going remains upon the mind, traceable and evident', yet 'the newer picture is yet enigmatical […] so that the new England of our children's children is still a riddle to me.'[20]

For Jed Esty, such experiences of modernity mapped on to changes in literary form, in which global capitalist growth was implicated in the breakdown of nineteenth-century *Bildung* narratives and the rise of literary modernism – of which *Tono-Bungay* itself is a part, bridging as it does traditional and modernist forms. Following Franco Moretti, Esty understands the *Bildungsroman* to embody the nineteenth-century ideal of bounded progress.[21] Yet, as industrialisation and imperialism progressed and capitalist development began to spread beyond the borders of European nation-states, Esty sees the developmental logic of the *Bildungsroman* as becoming strained.[22] The figure of frozen or endless youth thus became a trope, in modernist fiction, for the unfinished and open-ended nature of modernity: a rejection of the *Bildungsroman* ideal of smooth progress towards a final *telos*.[23] In this sense, George Ponderevo's failure to mature is linked to hyperproduction, and the corrosive effects of mass commodity capitalism; the Quap-like metastasis he perceives in his surroundings. Endless development collapses into the absence of development.

Narrating Modernity: Modernism, Progress and the Industrial Revolution

Yet this poses the question: what is the relationship of modernist literature to the wider cultural experience of modernity? Peter Mandler has written of the historiographical tendency

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[19] Wells, p.88.

[20] Wells, p.9.

[21] For Esty and Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* fused individual experience and social transformation by creating a soul-nation allegory, in which the development of individual character was analogous to the development of the nation as a whole. Youth, in this view, served as a trope for modernity itself, signifying the transformation of industrial society. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture,* trans. Albert Sbraglia (London: Verso, 2000), p.6, and Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.3-7.

[22] Esty conceptualises this as modernism's encounter with the problem of 'bad infinity', as history unfolds into the future without aim or end. Once the developmental logic of the *Bildungsroman*, in which soul and nation grow together and then stop, is destabilised, it becomes difficult to distinguish between constant change and no change. Esty, pp.26-9

[23] Esty, pp.6-7.

to view 'the arts of a culture' as a 'mirror of its condition in a wider sense' that 'this is true only on the most banal level. Any more profound truthfulness requires close attention to the relationship of a specific artistic group to its wider cultural context in its own time.'[24] Moreover, Mandler writes, 'even on a sophisticated level' the idea of modernism as a straightforward 'mirror' to the experience of modernity is misguided: 'modernism is, of course, at least in the early twentieth century, an ideology of avant-gardes. Its relationship to the wider culture is by definition complex and vexed. Why should we expect an avant-garde to mirror a dominant culture when, in fact, its job is precisely the opposite?'[25]

Early twentieth-century modernist literature and art was intensely preoccupied with the nature of change in modernity, and the effects of modernisation upon consciousness and subjectivity; yet how widespread was this preoccupation in the period's culture, and to what extent was it restricted to literary and artistic modernism itself?

The following section considers two types of source – mass advertising and working-class autobiography – as entry points into assessing the wider cultural 'throw' of debates surrounding the nature of change in modernity. One the one hand, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advertising reveals the cultural diffusion of debates about the nature of modernity. Advertisers had an economic imperative to translate the rationality of mass-production into a rationality of consumption – in other words, to create a stable mass market of 'modern consumers' that would make profitable economies of scale.[26] In doing so, advertisers presented commodities as helping consumers negotiate the transition to modernity: both assuring consumers that they could participate in a new, distinctively modern age, and reassuring consumers that mass-produced goods maintained continuity with national traditions. On the other hand, working-class autobiographical writing illuminates the literary modes through which autobiographers articulated their own subjectivities and emotional lives, and located their life stories within wider processes of historical change.

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[24] Mandler, p.107.
[25] Mandler, p.108.
[26] Following Marx's well-known formulation that 'production not only creates an object for the subject but also a subject for the object', it is argued that advertising worked to create new modes of social perception, structuring and ordering the desires of consumers according to the interests of manufacturers. See, for example, Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800-2000,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.5 and 84.

Late Victorian and Edwardian advertisements frequently invoked a sense of modernity, often alluding to anxieties surrounding the nature of change in order to present commodities as agents of both progress and stability. Advertisements emphasised the positive qualities of modernity, and the role of consumption in the modernising process, but they also provided a sense of continuity with the past – perhaps providing a degree of certainty in the consumer imagination amidst a turbulent world in which old certainties were fading away. Of course, it cannot be assumed that consumers identified unequivocally with representations of modernity in advertisements, nor accepted unquestioningly the appeal of modern consumerism. Yet whilst advertisers shape consumer demand, consumer desires cannot be created *ex nihilo* – the strategies employed most consistently in advertising must have been familiar (and aspirational) to consumers for them to be effective.[27] During the first years of the twentieth century, one of the most common tropes in advertisements aimed at middle- and working-class consumers was to present before-and-after narratives in which the commodity drew a dividing line between past and present. Exemplary of this motif was a cocoa advertisement [Figure 1] which juxtaposed 'the past', represented by a poor, miserable woman in patched clothing amidst the deprivation of her domestic surroundings, holding a cup of 'un-nourishing cocoa', with 'the present', in which a happy, youthful housewife holds out a cup of 'nourishing cocoa' in her clean and orderly kitchen. Such narratives keyed into contemporary hopes at the dawn of the Edwardian age, after the uncertainty of the *fin de siècle*, that liberation from the social problems of the past was possible – of a sense of a breach between the Victorian past and a new age of change.[28]

Equally, though, advertisers represented commodities as overseeing processes of change and regeneration, whilst maintaining essential links with national tradition – as in an advertisement for Monkey Brand Soap published in January 1903 [Figure 2]. In a conspicuously medieval setting, an anthropomorphic monkey sweeps away the dust from a room, the clouds of which form the demonic figure of an old woman, under which is written '1902'. Meanwhile a cherub, whose halo reads 'a bright new year', arrives through a window bearing a box of soap. The historical setting, combined with the emphasis on the regenerative possibilities of the new year, reinforces the commodity's role as providing continuity with the past, yet spearheading progress and modernity.

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[27] For a further discussion of the methodological liabilities of using advertising as a cultural source, see Chapter Two, 'The Language of Hurry'.

[28] Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind,* (London: Pimlico, 1991), pp.9-15, and Simon Nowell-Smith (ed), *Edwardian England 1901-1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.viii.

[Figure 1] 'Plasmon Cocoa', *Illustrated London News,* 28th February 1903.

In advertising copy throughout the period, modernity is unequivocally associated with urbanism: the 'wear and tear of city life', the 'atmosphere of crowded city offices', and so on.[29] References to anxieties surrounding 'modern times', 'modern living' and 'modern existence' are commonplace, with the commodity presented as allaying anxieties surrounding the dangers of modernity; facilitating progressive change as well as protecting consumers from the destructive elements of modernisation. The sheer pervasiveness of these themes in advertisements over three decades would suggest that the nature of change in modernity was of genuine concern in the popular consumer imagination.

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[29] For example, Vi-Cocoa', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 1st August 1903, and 'Wincarnis Tonic Wine', *Penny Illustrated Paper,* 5th December 1908.

[Figure 2] 'Monkey Brand Soap', *Illustrated London News,* 3rd January 1903.

In contrast, explicit references to modernity and the 'modern' are notably absent from working-class autobiographical writing. If, as Esty suggests, the breakdown of nineteenth-century *bildung* narratives and the rise of modernist narratives of frozen youth were integral to modern consciousness itself, then we might expect to find a reflection of this in the writings of working-class autobiographers (for example: a problematisation of traditional narratives of character formation, a modernistic awareness of subjectivity as fractured, multiple and shifting, or experimental, nonlinear modes of narrative representation).[30] Yet working-class autobiographers writing their accounts in the first decades of the twentieth century framed neither their subjectivities nor their life stories in this way. Indeed, Jonathan

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[30] Esty, *Foreword,* and pp.14 and p.43.

Rose has argued that is unlikely that the majority of working-class autobiographers (even those writing their accounts of an earlier age in the mid-twentieth century) would have been familiar with modernism. He notes that working-class readers displayed a marked preference for the classical canon, and even the most avid of working-class autodidacts generally did not read modernist literature until well into the twentieth century.[31]

The vast majority of autobiographies adhere to traditional, realist generic conventions – titles such as *From Coal Mine Upwards,* or *From the Stonemason's Bench to the Treasury Bench* indicate the extent to which autobiographers conceived of and wrote their life experiences in the developmental narrative form of the *bildungsroman.*[32] It should be said that working-class autobiographies are perhaps a genre particularly suited to a progressive logic: many autobiographers *did* rise above their modest social beginnings and find financial, political or literary success later in life, and understandably presented their life stories in these terms.

Yet even for those authors who rejected self-identification as a 'success story' (or characterisation as a 'working-class kid made good'), the rejection of this narrative does not bear an unequivocal relationship to literary modernism. Edwin Muir, for example, explicitly reflected upon the insufficiency of traditional narrative conventions of working-class autobiography:

> If I were a self-made man perfectly satisfied with what I had made I could find a meaning in these years, and congratulate myself that I am better, or at least better off, now than I was then. But the complacency which can do this shocks me, and when I read the self-told tales of successful business-men and Labour leaders who wear their youth as if they were flaunting a dingy decoration, and think it is a prodigious moral feat to have risen a little in the world, to be a little further above the slums, I feel ashamed. […] The thought that life can be for tens of thousands what it was to me after I came to Glasgow – and far worse, for I never lived in a slum – painfully troubles me; for it means that human life can be made up of rubbish streaked with all

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[31] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.125-7.
Christopher Hilliard has alternatively suggested that early twentieth-century autodidacts were not excluded from engaging with modernism due to its 'obscurantism', but rejected modernist literature due to popular conceptions about literature, and what constituted 'good writing', that derived from English Romanticism. Christopher Hilliard, 'Modernism and the Common Writer', *The Historical Journal,* 48, 3 (2005).
[32] For example, James Dunn, *From Coal Mine Upwards, Or, 70 years of an eventful life* (London: W. Green, 1910), and Henry Broadhurst, *Henry Broadhurst, MP, the Story of His Life from a Stonemason's Bench to the Treasury Bench. Told by Himself,* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1901).

the great major catastrophes of human life, like a pudding made of cheap ingredients, except for the tragedy, which is real.[33]

By the time of writing his autobiography, Muir was a successful poet, critic, and translator of Kafka. Eminently familiar with literary modernism (indeed, his first volume of writings was entitled *We Moderns*), Muir's poetry displays a modernist fascination with dream, myth and fable, though it is written in traditional metrical forms.[34] In his autobiography, Muir conceived of his own subjectivity in terms of the structures of myth and archetype, as if his own biography recapitulated the drama of the Fall: from Orkney to Glasgow, from Eden to Hell. His autobiography is pervaded by a sense of rupture in modernity, but also with a very un-modernist nostalgia for the innocence of nature, and an intense Romanticism. He wrote of his emotional life in terms of temporal and psychological rupture, reflecting that:

> I was born before the Industrial Revolution, and am now about two hundred years old […] in 1751 I set out from Orkney for Glasgow. When I arrived I found that it was not 1751, but 1901, and that a hundred and fifty years had been burned up in my two days' journey. But I myself was still in 1751, and remained there for a long time.[35]

Rural-urban migration, for Muir, was a move 'out of order into chaos'[36] Whilst the adolescent Muir was eventually able to comprehend 'the violence of the change', he suggested that it proved harder for his parents, after a lifetime in Orkney, to adjust emotionally to urban life: 'the rest of us too presently came to understand this, but my father and mother never did […] The old sense of security had gone.' Muir writes that 'this new state of things worried and perplexed my mother' and reflected in hindsight that their changed temporal and emotional landscape was precipitated by becoming 'members of the proletariat' (though he had not heard the word at the time), 'yet somewhere in our minds we were conscious of it'.[37]

The Romantic view of industrialisation as a dehumanising process of disenchantment – what Emma Griffin terms the 'dark interpretation' of the Industrial Revolution – is a common

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[33] Edwin Muir, *The Story and The Fable: An Autobiography* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1940), pp.129-30.

[34] Edward Moore [pseud. = Edwin Muir], *We Moderns: Enigmas and Guesses* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1918).

[35] Edwin Muir, 'Extracts from Diaries', in *An Autobiography*, (1954; Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1993), p.289.

[36] Muir, *The Story and the Fable,* p.72.

[37] Muir, *The Story and the Fable,* pp.107-9.

ordering principle in working-class autobiography of the period. [38] In his unpublished memoir, Frank Goss (who, at times, relished urban life) conceived of his father's unemployment in similar terms:

> It was in this spring of 1902 that the consequences of the industrial revolution caught up with us as a family. It had, I believe, been going on for a long time before this and legions of families over the past one hundred and fifty years had been beaten to their knees by its impact. Some had survived, some had even prospered, but it had come upon an unnumbered host like the visitation of a plague destroying their wellbeing, ruining and starving them, and leaving them destitute, crippled and dying in its wake.[39]

The sense of the Industrial Revolution as having created a sense of rupture between past and present, and having irreversibly destroyed traditional modes of rural existence, is also common in the autobiographies. Thomas Bell, for example, framed his childhood in terms of the encroachment of industrialisation into the semi-rural outskirts of Glasgow: 'When I was born […] the smell of oil and smoke, the thud of the Sampson hammer and the glare of furnace fires were fast banishing the scents and sounds and colours of the country.' [40] Similarly, F. H. Spencer wrote of growing up amid the expansion of railworks around Swindon: 'an industrial revolution, at last, had infected this beautiful piece of North Wessex, bringing, as I now see, energy and ideas, but ugliness and confusion in its train.'[41] James Whittaker, who returned to his Edinburgh tenement after a childhood summer in the countryside, reflected that 'something' had been lost amid the world of industrial machinery and hurry: 'the beauty of a real world whose pristine sweetness man's ingenuity had destroyed.'[42]

It seems, then, that whilst working-class autobiographers did not engage with modernism – either in terms of narrative form, or the ways in which they located their own experience in

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[38] Griffin has criticised historians for interpreting the social and cultural effects of industrialisation in much the same way as the intellectuals who lived through it. She argues that working-class autobiographies present a challenge to the 'dark interpretation' of the industrial revolution, revealing the ways in which autobiographers were 'empowered' by the transition to industrial employment and city life. Yet whilst Griffin's study emphasised positive attitudes to urban life, the accounts of autobiographers from the later period of the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries do not produce such a straightforwardly rosy picture. Emma Griffin *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), p.16.

[39] Frank Goss, *My Boyhood at the Turn of the Century,* TS, 2:331 (Burnett Archive of Working-Class Autobiographies, Brunel University, p.51.

[40] Thomas Bell *Pioneering Days* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1941), p.13.

[41] F. H. Spencer, *An Inspector's Testament* (London: The English Universities Press Ltd, 1938), p.7.

[42] James Whittaker, *I, James Whittaker* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1934), p.47.

historical time – they do display and intense awareness of living in changed times, characterised by a fundamental breach between past and present. They frequently reflected, too, upon the psychological and cultural effects of modernity. Yet they did not frame this experience around 'modernity' as a conceptual device; rather, they made sense of their experience by locating themselves within Romantic tropes of the Industrial Revolution.[43] By the late Victorian period, working-class autodidacts would have been immersed in intellectual critiques of the city made over the course of the nineteenth century in a wide range of discourses. Even relatively uneducated people would be familiar with tropes of the shock of the city – the green and pleasant land destroyed by dark, satanic mills. Indeed, Christopher Hilliard has written that the early twentieth-century popular readership was hostile to modernism – this was a hostility underpinned by their identification with Romantic literature that celebrated the pleasures of nature.[44] Romanticism seems to have provided autobiographers with an emotional language in which to express criticisms of urban life, their nostalgia for nature and the loss of modes of existence that they associated with rural life.[45] In common with Romantic writers, a significant number of autobiographers indicted the modern city for its spiritual and aesthetic impoverishment, and the vanishing of the sublime amid the monotony and mechanical nature of urban life.

Disenchantment and the Search for Meaning

Across a wide range of discourses, contemporaries indicted the modern city for this sense of spiritual impoverishment, and lamented the disenchantment they believed to be inherent in the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation.[46] Social commentators and novelists, as well as working-class autobiographers, indicted the limiting materialism that they perceived

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[43] I use 'Romantic', here, partly in a cultural-studies sense of the term, close to that of Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*: as a tradition rooted in a critique of the utilitarian and mechanistic values of industrialism; a sense that an increasingly urban and industrial society was threatening certain human values and qualities of living best embodied by both the arts, and the beauty and inspirations of nature. Raymond Williams *Culture and Society, 1780—1950* (New York: Anchor Books), 1960, pp.39-36.

[44] Hilliard, pp.769 and 772.

[45] Yet Romanticism also provided autobiographers with a language that could be used to celebrate the positive aspects of urban life – the sense of freedom, adventure and excitement that they found in the city. For further discussion, see Chapter Two.

[46] This is not to suggest that religious belief was entirely absent in the cities of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries (and nor did contemporary observers themselves suggest this). Rather, it is to emphasise that whilst religious belief continued to motivate many in society, its claim to an all-encompassing and unifying worldview was becoming ever more modest.

in the urban environment, and they expressed in a range of idioms a yearning for the ideal and the transcendent: for the 'unseen', the 'unknown', the 'invisible'; for a 'framework of meaning', a 'background to life'; for a 'Something' that lay veiled behind the circumscribed material horizons, and the mundane and profane realities of urban life.[47] Such accounts are characterised by an almost paralysing sense of loss: the loss of access to the beauty of nature and the influence of religion, of traditional forms of community, of ways of endowing human action with a wider sense of meaning, and even of the human appetite for joy. Yet there is also, in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, a search for new forms of enchantment, new sources of meaning, and new ways of finding beauty amid the vastness and energies of the modern city. For Berman, this was the central contradiction of the experience of modernity, in which 'mankind found itself in the midst of a great absence and emptiness of values and yet, at the same time, a remarkable abundance of possibilities.'[48]

In these assessments, the influences of nature and religion in providing an organisational framework for meaning are often inseparable. The rural past was seen to have provided both forms of social organisation that located the individual within a wider framework of significance, and a sense of spiritual unity occasioned by the beauty of nature. For Charles Masterman, 'the spiritual world, whether in Nature, or Art, or in definite Religion, has vanished, and the curtain of the horizon has descended round the material things […] In former time in England […] the things of the earth were shot with spiritual significance.'[49] In *Howards End,* E. M. Forster wrote similarly that 'under cosmopolitanism […] we shall receive no help from the earth. Trees and meadows and mountains will only be a spectacle'; the 'binding force they once exercised on character' was felt to be lost amid the artificiality of urban life.[50]

Forster envisaged London as a 'caricature of infinity': the vastness of the city merely masqueraded as the sublime, and was ultimately a monstrous agglomeration without cohesion.[51] For Masterman, 'the city state, concentrated in such a centre as London, remains

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[47] For example, E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910; London: Penguin, 1953), pp.73-108; H. G.Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1909; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010); p.352; Whittaker, p.47; C. F. G. Masterman, *In Peril of Change, Essays Written in Time of Tranquility* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1905), p.xii, and C. F. G. Masterman (ed), *The Heart of the Empire: a discussion of problems of Modern City Life in England* (1901; London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907)*,* p.30.
[48] Berman, p.21.
[49] Masterman, *Heart of the Empire,* pp.8-9.
[50] Forster, p.243.
[51] Forster, p.261.

as meaningless and as impossible to co-ordinate with any theory of spiritual purposes as the law of gravitation itself.'[52] He lamented the absence, in the 'chaotic aggregation' of large cities, of 'a background setting present action, however obscure, into some large framework of meaning': 'without it the drifting through time of the interminable multitude of the unimportant becomes a mere nightmare vision of striving signifying nothing, "doing and undoing without end."'[53] In a variety of emotional registers – from nightmarish fear and pessimistic despair, to resigned distaste, savage irony, and comic incongruity – social critics and novelists voiced a sense of the absence of meaning; the 'immense effect of purposelessness' in the modern city. These tonal shifts surrounding the search for meaning, which will be explored in more detail later in the chapter, can be found in Wells's *Tono-Bungay*. George Ponderevo's friend, the somewhat dissolute aesthete Ewart, displays a sense of comic bafflement at the apparent purposelessness of modern urban energies:

> 'London!,' I began. 'It's – so enormous!'
> 'Isn't it! And it's all up to nothing. You find chaps keeping grocers' shops – why the *devil*, Ponderevo, do they keep grocers' shops? They all do it carefully, very steadily, very meanly. You find people running about doing the most remarkable things – being policemen, for example, and burglars. They go about these businesses quite gravely and earnestly. I – somehow – can't go about mine. Is there any sense in it at all – anywhere?[54]

Throughout the novel, farce turns to pathos, which turns to farce again. For George, too, the bustle and activity of urban scenes conclude, time and again, in his asking 'But after all, *why--*?' His initial excitement at the sight of sailors at work in a busy industrial dockyard turns to disgust: 'I was first seized with admiration of their courage and toughness and then, "But after all, *why--*?" and the stupid ugliness of all this waste and endurance came home to me.

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[52] Masterman, *In Peril of Change,* pp.xii-xiii.
[53] Masterman, *Heart of the Empire,* p.30.
'Signifying nothing' is perhaps an allusion to Macbeth's famous soliloquy 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow', and its sense of benumbed inurement to life's tragedies and horrors.
'Doing and undoing without end' is certainly a quotation from the nineteenth-century American philosopher Chauncey Wright's vision of ultimate reality. Influenced by evolutionary theory, Wright envisaged reality as a kind of ateleological 'cosmic weather'. It is possible that Masterman's allusion to Wright itself referenced William James' essay 'Is Life Worth Living?'. James wrote of the 'bankruptcy' of nineteenth-century materialism: 'for such persons the physical order of nature, taken simply as Science knows it, cannot be held to reveal any one harmonious spiritual intent. It is mere *weather,* as Chauncey Wright called it, "doing and undoing without end". Now I wish to make you feel […] that we have a right to believe that the physical order is only a partial order; we have a right to supplement it by an unseen spiritual order which we assume on trust, if only thereby life may seem to us better worth living again.'
William James, *Is Life Worth Living?* (Philadephia: S. Burns Weston, 1896), p.42.
See also 'Wright', in John R. Stock (ed), *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), pp.2654-5.
[54] Wells, pp.95-6

[…] And I had imagined great things of the sea!' His feelings of purposelessness create a sense of the existential pointlessness of the modern age. George describes his mental state to his uncle: 'I want some *stuff,* man. I want something to hold on to. I shall go amok if I don't get it. […] *I* feel like a man floundering in a universe of soapsuds, up and down, east and west. I can't stand it. I must get my foot on something solid or – I don't know what.'[55] His apprehension of the directionless-ness and fluidity of modern urban life turns from the possibilities of adventure (whether earnest or absurdist) to cultural despair.

A number of writers reflected critically upon the pervasive sense of cultural despair in late Victorian and Edwardian high (as well as, in the case of Wells, middle-brow) culture. In William Morris' *News from Nowhere,* the narrator muses that 'the prevailing feeling among intellectual persons was a kind of sour distaste […] in those days it was thought poetic and imaginative to look upon life as a thing to be borne, rather than enjoyed'.[56] This was a view echoed by Morris in his essay 'Art under Plutocracy', in which he indicted the middle and upper classes for 'lacking all interest in life except, it may be, the cultivation of unhappiness as a fine art.'[57] Charles Ashbee emphasised the specifically urban nature of this cultural malaise, locating it within a framework of global modernity: 'the new link that is binding these [international] cities together is not politics, nor nationality, nor religion; rather, it is a sense that something is wrong with life'.[58] Thomas Hardy wrote of 'the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilised races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power.'[59] In an often-quoted passage from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* Tess and Angel reflect upon the inescapability of modernity, and the sense of living in a 'blighted' world characterised by a vague sense of unhappiness, as humanity inexorably progressed towards mechanisation, urbanisation and dislocation:

> 'What makes you draw off in that way, Tess?' said he. 'Are you afraid?'
> 'Oh no, sir… not of outdoor things; especially just now when the apple-booth is falling, and everything so green.'
> 'But you have your indoor fears – eh?'
> 'Well – yes, sir.'

[55] Wells, pp.38 and 180.
[56] William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, an Epoch of Rest* (1890), in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.224.
[57] William Morris, 'Art under Plutocracy' in Normal Kelvin (ed), *William Morris on Art and Socialism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), p.118.
[58] C. R. Ashbee, *Where the Great City Stands: A Study in the New Civics* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1917), p.95.
[59] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* (1891; Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p.104.

'What of?'
'I couldn't quite say.'
'The milk turning sour?'
'No.'
'Life in general?'
'Yes, sir.'
'Ah – so have I, very often. This hobble of being alive is rather serious don't you think so?'
[…] She was expressing in her own native phrases – assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training – feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism.[60]

For Hardy, these existential questionings were characteristically *indoor* fears – as if to suggest that such anxieties were the product of a society severed from a pre-modern sense of unity with nature. The more immediate and natural (and perhaps more innocent) 'outdoor' fears of pastoral life are contrasted to the chronically pervasive anxieties of modernity. The anxiety inherent in Hardy's vision of modernity is a kind of dull ache that diminishes 'the "appetite for joy" which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed.'[61] Edward Carpenter, too, identified existential angst surrounding the meaning of human existence as a distinctively modern phenomenon, located in an industrialised, urbanised world cut off from 'unity with Nature'. He wrote of the 'strong *feeling* of union with the universal spirit […] strange and pregnant of meaning' that he believed to be characteristic of preindustrial 'wild races'. 'Early man', he wrote,

troubled himself not with the suicidal questionings concerning the whence and the whither which now vex the modern mind. For what causes these questionings to be asked is simply the wretched feeling of isolation, actual or prospective, that man necessarily has when he contemplates himself as a separate atom in this immense universe.[62]

For Carpenter, this contemporary crisis of experience was the product of the long tradition of Western Individualism, which culminated in the social organisation of the modern industrial city. The sense of having 'a separate individuality' (as opposed to a pantheistic sense of subjectivity, joined holistically to 'the starry destinies; the changes of the earth, and the

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[60] Hardy, pp.109-10.
[61] Hardy, p.167.
[62] Edward Carpenter, 'Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure', *in Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays* (1889; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921). p.72.

seasons; the upward growth and unfoldment of all organic life') was itself a pathological condition; its tendency was exaggerated, amid the artificiality of the modern city, to the point of being 'suicidal'.[63]

Such 'suicidal questionings' can be found throughout the fiction of the period, and often centred on the search for meaning amid the complexity, as well as the inescapability of modern urban life. The protagonist of Wells' *Tono-Bungay* struggles to find meaning in existence following the breakdown of his marriage; even the progressive value of suffering to the protagonist's moral development is denied. Discussing his separation, George exclaims to his lover, Effie: 'Life is a thing that hurts, my dear! It hurts without logic or reason.' George reflects of his experience: 'yes, I had a very bad time – I still recall. I suffered, I suppose, from a sort of *ennui* of the imagination. I found myself without an object to hold my will together. […] There were moments when I thought of suicide.'[64] From a very different social perspective, the teenage protagonist Dicky Perrot in Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* also reflects upon the undesirability of living. He talks to Jerry Gullen, the owner of Canary, an emaciated donkey who fulfils a strange father-figure role for Dicky, and is his sole friend and confidant amid the unrelenting and brutalising poverty of slum life:

> Dicky stood and looked; he thought he would rub Canary's head, but then he changed his mind, and did not move. Jerry Gullen glanced at him furtively once or twice, and then said" 'Good ole moke for wear, ain't 'e?'
> 'Yus', Dicky answered moodily, his talk half random. ''E'll peg out soon now.'
> ''Im? Not 'im. Wy, I bed 'e'll live longer'n you will. '*E* ain't goin' to die.'
> 'I think 'e'd like to,' said Dicky, and slouched on.
> Yes, Canary would be better off, dead. So would others. It would be a comfortable thing for himself if he could die quietly then and there. […] What was this unendurable stupor that clung about him like a net?[65]

Throughout *A Child of the Jago,* meaning fails to emerge from either the story or the lives of its characters. Morrison's vision of the inescapability of slum life is one in which only death brings relief. As a child, Dicky is told by an elderly resident of the Jago, Old Beveridge, that there are only three ways out of the Jago: gaol, death by hanging, or to work his way through the ranks of criminal gangs to join the 'High Mob'. Yet as Dicky lies dying in the final lines of the novel, fatally wounded from a street fight, he reflects: 'Tell Mist' Beveridge there's

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[63] Carpenter, 'Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure', p.72.
[64] Wells, p.179
[65] Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago,* (1896; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012), p.163.

'nother way out – better.'[66] Dicky is not alone in the novel in envisaging death as an escape from the miseries of urban poverty, in which individual lives seem superfluous: 'he wondered if it has been so with little Neddy Wright, who had found the world too ruthless for him at ten; and had tied a brick to his neck, as he had seen done with needless dogs, and let himself timidly down into the canal at Haggerstone Bridge.'[67]

With some grounds, many reviewers of *A Child of the Jago* were critical of Morrison's unequivocally pessimistic depictions of urban life ('No one can read nearly 400 pages of unrelieved wretchedness, pessimism and ugliness without an effort too heroic to be expected in these days', wrote one reviewer.[68]) – often with the criticism that the despondency of the novel represented a 'wanton delight in gloom', and gave Morrison's depiction of slum life a sense of unreality.[69] Yet working-class autobiographies also hint that, for some, suicide was perceived as a calculated response to urban poverty, serving as a means of relief and escape. In her semi-fictionalised autobiography of a London slum, *Jipping Street,* Kathleen Woodward wrote of her childhood home: 'our back window commanded a view of the canal, that peremptory escape for the more impatient spirits of the neighbourhood, of whom there were not a few.'[70] Joseph Williamson wrote of his mother's depression during his childhood years of poverty in East London:

> Displays of sadness and tears before us were very few, but they were terrible. […] Once when she was near the end of her tether an exclamation of despair slipped out. We heard her cry, "I must go and drown myself." It meant she could see no escape from the everlasting grinding poverty and the agony of watching her little ones go hungry. […] Two or three times a week there would be a cry and a rush – "Someone in the Cut." For the most part the people who managed to drown themselves were women.[71]

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[66] Morrison, p.156.

[67] Morrison, p.102.

[68] Review of 'A Child of the Jago', *Critic* (24 Apr. 1897), quoted in 'Appendix' in Morrison, p.181.

[69] Quoted from an article in the *Bookman* that called a halt to reproaches against Morrison's depiction of slum life, and ventriloquised the objections of the novel's critics. The article argued that 'the reproaches cast at Mr Morrison that his […] 'Child of the Jago' gave a one-sided and very miserable account of East London life, must now cease. It is not a wanton delight in gloom that made him write so harshly of existence in the wildernesses of brick and mortar.' Indeed, many social reformers and journalists who had experience of working with the urban poor wrote sympathetically in the press that Morrison's unflinching despair tallied with their own observations of slum life. Robert Blatchford, for one, argued that the novel had *not gone far enough* in depicting the wretchedness of urban poverty.
'In London Town', *Bookman* (Nov. 1899), pp.58-9; see also Robert Blatchford, 'On Realism', in *My Favourite Books* (London, 1900), quoted in 'Appendix' in Morrison, pp.185-6.

[70] Kathleen Woodward, *Jipping Street* (1928; London: Virago Press, 1983), pp.27-8

[71] Joseph Williamson, *The Autobiography of Joseph Williamson of Poplar and Stepney* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), pp.19-20.

Implicit in Williamson's autobiography, which is narrated through the trope of his call to God and his escape from poverty by joining the priesthood, is his belief that religion could elevate the urban poor from the suffering of their daily lives – in this context, his depiction of suicide was perhaps intended as a savage indictment of an urban system which deprived the poor of the opportunity for salvation.

Howard Kushner has demonstrated that the connection between suicide and urban life has deep roots in Western thought. By the late nineteenth century, religious and secular explanations for urban suicide combined to produce the assertion – made across a range of genres, from medical writings to sociology and social commentary – that suicide was a product of the disillusionment, ennui and anomie of modern times; a general malaise characteristic of 'advanced civilisations.' Yet this was a view often based less upon evidence than on assumptions about the psychological effects of modernity. In an examination of Victorian sociological theories, which asserted that the transition from a traditional to a modern urban and industrial society was associated with rising suicide rates, Olive Anderson wrote that such beliefs 'were illustrated by statistics rather than founded on them.' In this way, the writings of social researchers and medical practitioners tended to reinforce existing preconceptions: as Kushner writes, 'in any case, the connection between modernity and suicide was so firmly established by the end of the nineteenth century that experts would see their task as uncovering precisely *why* rather than *whether* this was so.'[72]

Laughter, Boredom and Despair

The identification of modernity with suicidal tendencies across the social scale lay at the extreme end of contemporary assessments of cultural despair in urban life. More common was a sense of vague, listless ennui: of a kind of bloated disenchantment amid an absence of spiritual influences and a surfeit of material goods. Charles Masterman wrote of the cultural significance of the motor car that the excitements of its 'aimless' velocity represented 'an escape from the *ennui* of a life that has lost its savour; as in the tortured and bored procession of old Rome.' The general picture of modern life appeared to Masterman as 'an extravagance

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[72] Howard Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought, *Journal of Social History,* 23 (3), 1993, pp.462-7, and Olive Anderson, 'Did Suicide Increase with Industrialization in Victorian England?', *Past & Present,* 86 (1980), p.167.

of wealth and waste', yet one of 'rather dull and drab extravagance', in which 'life will be no happier and richer' for all its material excess.[73] Edward Carpenter, too, wrote of the material 'congestion' of modern urban life:

> You sit in a room crowded with knick-knacks, elegant trifles from all parts of the world. They are beautiful; I have not a word to say against them. And in the next house the rooms are crowded with similar trifles, and in the next and the next; and for miles round the same. […] It is all congestion. […] Congestion at the dinner party – congestion in twelve courses; so much to eat that eating is impossible. […] Congestion at the theatre, at the concert, yawning in dress-clothes […] Such a congestion of unused wealth and property, such a glut.[74]

The metaphors employed by Carpenter and Masterman are of taste: of once-natural appetites spoiled by dyspeptic surfeit. Such metaphors correspond to Hardy's 'appetite for joy'; itself associated with naturalistic metaphors and the wholesome pleasures of rural life. There is a sense among these authors that 'simple' pleasures had been corrupted by sheer overabundance in modern life, leading to a kind of stale boredom in modernity; a nasty taste in one's mouth.

This was, in many senses, a diagnosis of a distinctly bourgeois emotional condition. Yet novelists and social commentators recognised, too, that the working classes were themselves ensnared in the psychological and emotional effects of modern consumerism. Indeed, the working classes were the ones who were compelled to *produce* this 'glut' of material things. George Gissing wrote of the 'grimy burrows' of industrial cities: 'here you see how men have multiplied toil for toil's sake, have wrought to devise work superfluous, have worn their lives away in imagining new forms of weariness.'[75] This was the savage irony of the modern industrial system: that bourgeois tedium and working-class exhaustion were twin products of a single process, the effects of which were enervation throughout the social scale. In William Morris' *News from Nowhere,* the narrator asks the inhabitants of utopia if their spacious gardens are not wasteful of land. The response of the utopians is to ask the narrator: 'tell me if you think we *waste* the land by not covering it with factories for making things nobody wants, which was the chief business of the nineteenth century.' For Morris, the emotional impact of industrialisation upon the working classes was not that it blinded the poor to the

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[73] Charles Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1909), pp.22-3.
[74] Edward Carpenter, 'The Enchanted Thicket', in *England's Ideal, And other Papers on Social Subjects* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1887), p.140.
[75] George Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.11.

causes of their discontent, but that it destroyed their faith in the possibility of change: 'looking around they saw the huge mass of the oppressed classes too much burdened with the misery of their lives, and too much overwhelmed by the selfishness of misery, to be able to form a conception of any escape'. [76] If bourgeois ennui was a weariness induced by overconsumption, the weariness of the working classes was caused by the demands of production.

Yet another, very different emotional register was also employed by contemporaries with which to articulate the human condition in the modern city: a kind of jovial cheeriness, and a sense of comic incongruity, at the irrelevance of the individual amid the vast forces at work in modernity. In Wells's *Tono-Bungay,* George's existential despair is punctuated by farcical adventures in hyper-modern commodification, and a kind of vague and slightly mad unspecific cheerfulness. His uncle, Edward Ponderevo, is a man given over to fits of deranged hyperbole and unflappable good humour:

> 'London, George,' he said, […] 'It's a great place. Immense. The richest town in the world, the biggest port, the greatest manufacturing town, the Imperial city – the centre of civilisation, the heart of the world! See those sandwich men down there! The third one's hat! Fair treat! You don't see poverty like that in Wimblehurst, George! And many of them high Oxford honour men too. Brought down by drink! It's a wonderful place, George – a whirlpool, a maelstrom! whirls you up and whirls you down.[77]

Jonathan Rose has written of *Tono-Bungay* that 'there is an almost manic-depressive vacillation between bouncy Wellsian fun and total despair, as aristocratic England gives way to a commercial civilisation of patent-medicine tycoons and mass-market advertising.' He notes that G. K. Chesterton 'observed the same "jovial pessimism" in C. F. G. Masterman, who, in his frustrating career as a political reformer, alternated between cheery humour and the black gloom of *The Condition of England.'* [78] In turn, Masterman observed of the emotional temperament of the 'ordinary man of the ordinary street' that 'his acquiescence [is] sometimes shot with a vague discontent, more often with a certain fatuous cheerfulness.'[79] For Rose, Edwardian jolliness served to dispel gloomy anxieties surrounding decadence: 'in such cases, laughter served as the function that the psychologist William McDougall ascribed to it in 1903: it was a natural anaesthetic to relieve the misery of living, actuated not by joy,

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[76] Morris, *News from Nowhere,* pp. 106 and 134.
[77] Wells, p.77.
[78] Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), p.188.
[79] Masterman, *Heart of the Empire,* p.29.

but by pain.'[80] But despair, too, can be emotionally insulating: cultural pessimism precludes the anxiety that things might turn out worse than anticipated. In the structure of feeling of Edwardian jolliness, laughter undercut the solipsistic gloom of cultural despair – and yet, frequently, despair also undercut the laughter. Anxiety, depressiveness and brittle good humour were all overlaid in representations of the emotional condition of the modern city. There is a kind of dialectic between emotional extremes that, ultimately, revealed a sense of emptiness: a lack of stable forms of emotional expression and stable forms of meaning.

Looking for 'Something'

To what extent were assessments of the emotional condition of modernity – characterised by ennui, cultural malaise, and disenchantment – restricted to the anxieties of social elites and the literary intelligentsia? It is, of course, the self-stated role of novelists and social commentators to be more sensitive, more acutely aware of the emotional and psychological particularities of the period in which they live. The following section considers the ways in which three very different authors, E. M. Forster, H. G. Wells, and the working-class autobiographer James Whittaker, articulated their sense of loss and the search for meaning in modern urban life. It is striking that these three authors, from differing social backgrounds and with differing agendas, employed the same vocabulary with which to articulate their yearning for the transcendent: the language of 'Something', and its disappearance in the modern city.

In *Howards End,* Margaret Schlegel indicts Edwardian culture (in contrast to Continental Romanticism) for failing to take beauty seriously:

> the overhanging warehouses of Stettin take beauty seriously, which we don't and the average Englishman doesn't, and despises all who do. Now don't say "Germans have no taste," or I shall scream. They haven't. But – but – such a tremendous but! – they take poetry seriously. They do take poetry seriously […] The German is always on the look-out for beauty […] he wants something – beauty and all the other intangible gifts that are floating about the world.

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[80] Rose, p.188.

For Margaret, Continental literature and art, as opposed to the limiting materialism of English culture, 'have what one might call the kink of the unseen about them'.[81] Throughout *Howards End,* Forster articulates a yearning for an idealist, transcendent sense of spirituality through a series of shifting metaphors: 'the unseen', 'the unknown', 'infinity', the return to 'the One', and so on. For Forster, this apprehension of beauty and the transcendent had been lost amid industrial energies and the urbanising impulse; the modern city-dweller, famously, fails to 'connect'. But when the archetypal urban clerical worker, Leonard Bast walks out onto Wimbledon Common, re-entering the Nature of 'ancient night' and 'eternal sunrise', he finds an awareness of *something.* Leonard reflects upon his conversation with the Schlegel sisters as to the meaning of his journey into nature:

> He had hitherto supposed the unknown to be books, literature, clever conversation, culture. One raised oneself by study, and got upsides with the world. But in that quick interchange a new light dawned. Was that 'something' walking in the dark among the suburban hills?[82]

In *Aspects of the Novel,* Forster wrote that 'the world of beauty was entirely closed to Wells'.[83] Yet Wells's aesthetics, especially in *Tono-Bungay,* have more in common with Forster's than Forster might have liked to admit – not least in terms of their shared articulation of the yearning for 'Something', and its apparent loss in modernity. In his wider writing, Wells in turn was highly critical of the romantic-nostalgic tendencies of literature such as Forster's (and, indeed, was often dismissive of high culture in general). Simon James has written that Wells's antipathy towards the romantic valorisation of nature reflected his increasing hostility towards the over-idealisation of the high aesthetic culture of the past, not least because such nostalgia failed to address aspects of the urban present and future.[84] For Wells, Romanticism at its worst represented the illusory prettifying of reality – an escape from the social problems of the urban present via a retreat into aesthetically pleasing form, and the supposed certainties of a lost Golden Age of rural simplicity. Yet this very dismissal of false, illusory modes of Romanticism allowed Wells to advance his own, idiosyncratic view of romance, and its relationship to reality, truth and beauty. *Tono-Bungay* concludes

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[81] Forster, pp.72-3.
[82] Forster, p.118.
[83] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927; London: Penguin, 2005), p.34.
[84] Simon James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity and the End of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.15.

with George observing a note running through the narrative, which is by turns elegiac and hopeful:

> It is a note of crumbling and confusion, of change and seemingly aimless swelling, of a bubbling up and medley of futile loves and sorrows. But through the confusion sounds another note. Through the confusion something drives, something that is at once human achievement and the most inhuman of all existing things. Something comes out of it… How can I express the values of a thing at once so essential and immaterial! […] Sometimes I call this reality Science, sometimes I call it Truth. But it is something we draw by pain and effort out of the heart of life, that we disentangle and make clear. Other men serve it, I know, in art, in literature, in social invention, and see it in a thousand different figures, under a hundred names. I see it always as austerity, as beauty. This thing we make clear is the heart of life. It is the one enduring thing. […] I do not know what it is, this, something, except that it is supreme.[85]

The social reality of the modern city, in *Tono-Bungay*, has a definite quality of *unreality,* and of unreliability. The language of modernity is empty at its core, characterised by emptiness, hollowness, and disorienting fluidity. Advertising distorts reality; commodity culture is a hollow bubble, ready to burst; growth is blind, a 'wasting aimless fever'; forces run to waste.[86] Urban modernity, for Wells, seems to consist of reality emptied of substance, meaning or truth. The novel is haunted by this sense of loss – the loss of solidity to the experience of reality. But in George's 'Something', one gets the sense of the narrator struggling for words with which to articulate the inexpressible; there is a sense of inarticulable meaningfulness, the yearning to draw out of the heart of life a 'something' to underpin the fluidity of modernity.

James Whittaker, too, struggled to find a vocabulary with which to describe his sense of loss and the search for meaning in urban life. For Whittaker, who spent his early life in the slums of Edinburgh and Leith, his 'Something' was closely allied to nature and the pursuit of beauty. In his autobiography, he wrote of his discovery of beauty in terms of the synaesthetic pleasures of nature: the intersensory loveliness of the sights, sounds, smells and feel of the countryside.[87] He reflected of his first childhood visit to the countryside:

> For the first time in my life I knew beauty existed; and I have never forgotten to look for that priceless and painful thing since. There have been many times in my life

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[85] Wells, p.352.
[86] Wells, p.346.
[87] See also Chapter Six, 'The Cleansing of England', for further discussion of Whittaker's description of the beauty and pleasures of nature.

when I have cursed the circumstances which robbed me of education, but never more than when I tried to convey to others the sharp, stabbing thrill and ecstasy given to me by beautiful things. I have writhed inwardly, and blushed outwardly as I floundered in the shallows of my vocabulary to find words with which I could express myself better. […] How can I pass on the beauty I feel, and the beauty I know, when I have not the tongue?[88]

Whittaker consciously reflected that his emotional and aesthetic vocabulary was limited by his lowly social and educational beginnings. Yet he, too, described his desire for beauty and its disappearance in the modern city in terms strikingly similar to Forster and Wells. Returning from a childhood summer in the countryside, Whittaker's hatred of his Edinburgh tenement intensified, and he felt increasingly lost and alienated from slum life. Yet he was able to regain a measure of the serene contentment he experienced in nature by repeated visits to museums:

> The Egyptian relics attracted me most of all, and in their presence I felt, even at that time, there was an understanding "something" about them that understood me and my lostness. I knew they knew I adored them. I knew they knew I wanted sunshine and quietness and colour. And I was often aware of "something" coming from them that filled me with a warm, soothing fullness – a sensation which seemed to smooth away all the rough dirtiness and misery in the life I knew.[89]

Of course, the single example of Whittaker's autobiography is by no means representative of working-class experiences (no more than Forster alone is indicative of high cultural responses, or Wells typical of middlebrow culture). Yet identification with the Romantic valorisation of nature is widespread in working-class autobiographies. It reflected a wider appetite among lower- as well as middle-class urbanites for the experience of nature as a means of recovering an aestheticised sensibility, and sense of spirituality felt to be lost in the urban and industrial environment – something that will be explored at length in chapter six. Moreover, it seems significant that three radically different writers – from a range of social backgrounds, educational opportunities, aesthetic styles and authorial intentions – all articulated their intense desire for meaningfulness in such an evidently unspecific term as that of 'something'.

'Something', as a vehicle for meaning, seems manifestly vague, ambiguous and capacious. Lynne Hapgood has written of the late Victorian and Edwardian popular appetite for nature

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[88] Whittaker, p.46.
[89] Whittaker, p.47.

writing by authors such as Richard Jefferies that it offered urban and suburban readers 'a desirable but unspecific meaningfulness that could fill a spiritual vacuum and provide an apparently traditional and stable framework for thought.'[90] This seems to hold true for much of contemporary assessments of the emotional condition of modernity. A range of genres, from novels and social commentary, to sociological and medical writings about the effects of urbanisation, as well as working-class autobiographies, are pervaded by a sense of loss – especially the loss of stable forms of meaning in modern urban life. But suggestions for the recovery of meaning in modernity were often stable only because they were so emotionally capacious: encompassing a vaguely Romantic feeling for nature as something primitive and poetic, a pantheistic sense of spiritual significance, vitalism, and a reciprocal discovery of truth in beauty – a 'something' to counter the ugliness and materialist emptiness of the modern city.

Urban Enchantments

However, the modern city did not always appear to late Victorians and Edwardians as disenchanted, spiritually impoverished, and emptied of meaning. For many, there were sources of enchantment to be found amid the vastness and complexity of modern urban life, in which the sublime and the beautiful could be glimpsed behind the fluidity of urban energies. Joshua Landy and Michael Saler have challenged the understanding of modernity as characterised by an unequivocal process of secular disenchantment, writing that

> each time religion reluctantly withdrew from a particular area of experience, a new, thoroughly secular strategy for re-enchantment cheerfully emerged to fill the void […] Between them, philosophers, artists, architects, poets, stage magicians, and ordinary citizens made it possible to enjoy many of the benefits previously offered by faith, without having to subscribe to a creed; the progressive disenchantment of the world was thus accompanied, from the start and continually, by its progressive re-enchantment.

Moreover, for Landy and Saler, forms of re-enchantment in late Victorian and Edwardian culture were not solely those of 'relic', or 'throwback' to premodern forms. 'Of course', they acknowledge,

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[90] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The suburbs in fiction and culture 1880-1925,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.69.

no one would deny the stunning longevity of atavistic yearnings within industrialised cultures […] the point, however, is that these are not the only two options. There remains a third type of enchantment, unjustly overlooked, which is the modern enchantment *par excellence*: one which simultaneously enchants and disenchants, which delights but does not delude.[91]

Such forms of re-enchantment were both compatible with, and dependent upon the features of modernity that were conventionally regarded as disenchanting. Routinely, in late Victorian and Edwardian thought, disenchantment denoted the decline of mystery in the world: of the rationalising, scientistic logic of urbanisation and industrialisation. Yet the modern industrial city could be envisaged, in all its vast scale, complexity and contradictory energies, as itself mysterious. In *Tono-Bungay,* for example, whilst George recognises beauty for the first time in the countryside, his move to London only serves to intensify his apprehension of the sublime:

> The whole illimitable place teemed with suggestions of indefinite and sometimes outrageous possibility, of hidden but magnificent meanings. It wasn't simply that I received a vast impression of space and multitude and opportunity; intimate things also were suddenly dragged from neglected, veiled and darkened corners into an acute vividness of perception. I was made aware of beauty as not only permissible but desirable and frequent, and of a thousand hitherto unsuspected rich aspects of life.[92]

Lynne Hapgood has noted a similar sense of enchantment in the novels of G. K. Chesterton, in which the ordinariness of urban and suburban life was infused with a sense of the extraordinary. She writes that, for Chesterton, suburban landscapes were suffused with 'imaginative power': quotidian objects such as lamp-posts could be invested with an 'essential identity', conveying a sense of 'the romance of shadows and unfamiliar colours.'[93]

Whilst, for Wells and Chesterton, the sources of enchantment in the city were those of beauty and imaginative adventure, for others there were darker and more dangerous forces hidden behind the city's rational face. Nicholas Freeman writes of symbolist representations of London that they conveyed a sense of the metropolis as 'a world of shadows and uncertainty', which at its darkest suggested a vision of the city as a hellish underworld, whose

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[91] Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, 'Introduction: The Varieties of Modern Enchantment', in Joshua Landy and Michael Saler (eds), *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp.1-3.
[92] Wells, pp.91-2.
[93] Hapgood, pp.231-2.

essential character was revealed 'only to enlightened (or cursed) souls': For Freeman, the view that 'the Victorians never felt more cut off from the transcendent than in their cities […] is only partially true. The transcendent signals other orders of reality beyond the quotidian, and the idea that these might be malign or simply indifferent to human fates was yet more terrifying than being abandoned by God.'[94]

Kelley Hurley has noted a similar tendency in the increasingly metropolitan setting of Gothic fiction around the *fin de siècle.* She notes that there is a dialectic in which anxious perceptions of London as 'a *chaosmos* – a space of meaningless noise, activity, [and] sensation' had their inverse in the 'paranoid fantasy of a London whose *seeming* indifferentiation masks a network of deeply-laid and infernal designs.'[95] These hidden realities – whether romantically enchanting or darkly sinister – that seemingly dwelt beneath the city's quotidian face were most often associated with the city at night. Lynda Nead has written that Victorian literature of the night-side of London conveyed a sense of metropolitan night as a sphere of 'imagination, dread and dream': a place of essential ambiguity, in which gaslit scenes were both seductive and threatening. Whilst nineteenth-century urban improvements aimed to eliminate disorder and superstition, for Nead 'night-time London troubled the modernisers' because it 'represented a return of these old anxieties through the uncertain vision of mist, gaslight or the dream.'[96]

In Nead's view, the contemporary sense of the enchantment of urban night was identified with the 'old anxieties' and 'superstition' of pre-modern beliefs; the return of older modes of perception with the onset of nightfall is envisaged as undercutting the rationalising impulse embodied in the daytime modernising efforts of urban planners and reformers. Yet it is significant that these representations of the enchanted night-side of London were made in the sphere of imaginative literature (and not in the writings of urban planners themselves). Michael Saler has argued that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imaginative literature itself represented a distinctively *modern* mode of re-enchantment, 'in which imaginary worlds and fictional characters have replaced the sacred groves and tutelary

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[94] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.201-2.
[95] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.185.
[96] Nead, pp.102-6.

deitites of the premodern world.'[97] In this sense, literature that depicted the modern city as a place of mystery and enchantment did not so much represent a retreat from modern disenchantment into premodern ways of envisaging the world, as it signified a modern form of enchantment which, in Saler's terminology, 'delighted' but did not 'delude'. In this sense, such imaginative literature perhaps held therapeutic functions for its (predominantly urbanised) readership. It can be understood as a wilful form of imaginatively re-enchanting the modern city; creating a sense of magic and mystery in the urban world that, for its readers, was known to be false but felt to be true.

The Failure of the Nineteenth Century

In many ways, the cultural pessimism of contemporary assessments of the emotional condition of England is suggestive of a historical paradox. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries witnessed sustained efforts towards urban improvements: in sanitation and water supply, improved modes of transport, electric lighting, slum clearances, social housing, municipal reform, and new forms of urban voluntarism such as the Salvation Army. There were many grounds for a sense of civic pride and cultural achievement. Indeed, Andrew Lees has highlighted the often-overlooked 'sense of communal achievement' amongst urban planners and reformers, as well as local and national governments. 'Civic pride', in Lees' assessment, 'became ever more widespread as time went on. The conviction that town governments were demonstrating their ability to cope successfully with the urban challenge asserted itself more and more forcefully with each passing decade'.[98] This is not to say that those who vaunted urban progress were blind to the continuing social problems of the period, but that they expressed faith that solutions to remaining urban problems lay in the decades ahead. As will be examined in Chapter Four, Patrick Geddes, for example, contrasted the 'Paleotechnic' cities of the nineteenth century with the nascent 'Neotechnic' age of urban renewal, in which technological advances would be applied intelligently to the solution of social problems such as poverty and overwork.[99]

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[97] Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.3 and 12.
[98] Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived:Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.219-21 and 233.
[99] Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1915), p.60.

Yet despite his faith in the possibilities of future urban improvements, Geddes acknowledged the emotional confusion of this civic 'awakening':

> This civic self is still too inarticulate: we cannot give it clear expression: it is yet mostly in the stage of a strife of feelings, in which pain and pleasure, pride and shame, misgivings and hopes are variously mingling, and from which definite ideas and ideals are only beginning here and there to emerge.[100]

Geddes expressed hope that this partial awakening of civic consciousness would come to fruition in the fullness of time. For others, however, the partial nature of urban improvements was itself indicative of cultural passivity, and sterility in modern intellectual and emotional life. Charles Ashbee wrote that industrial waste was indicative of 'a want of thought, a want of purpose, a want of imagination'; 'the nation suffers from lack of imagination. Few of us can imagine a better state of society, a fuller life.'[101] Similarly, Masterman noted of the emotional and intellectual condition of England that material advancement coexisted with 'a strange mediocrity, a strange sterility of characters of supreme power in Church and State […] a waning of the power of inspiration, a multiplying of the power of criticism.'[102] In his study of *National Life and Character: A Forecast,* Charles Pearson sought to explain why, as he saw it, modern urban life tended towards intellectual sterility and a lack of genius. To be sure, Pearson acknowledged, there had been much technological and municipal progress in urban life:

> Not only have sanitary conditions been improved, but labour has been regulated with the best possible results. The horrors of the factory system have been mitigated or removed by the legislation Lord Shaftesbury initiated; and the increasing power of Trades-Unions is making the revival of overwork on a large scape impossible. […] Some occupations that were poisonous have now been made reasonably safe.

However, for Pearson, 'it must be borne in mind that the city life which we associate from history with ardent public spirit and susceptibility of great ideas was never trammelled by the limitations which cramp a great capital of modern times'. He wrote that whilst 'it is, perhaps, too early to decide whether town life is dying at the top', it seemed certain that 'as towns grow to dimensions never dreamed of as possible, it must be increasingly difficult for a few men, however brilliant, to give direction to the thought of the whole urban community.' If the

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[100] Geddes, p.2.
[101] Ashbee, pp.83 and 88.
[102] Masterman, *Condition of England,* pp.27-8.

vastness of the city militated against the intellectual energies of Great Men, its effect upon the average urbanite was even greater: 'the dweller in a great city is tending more and more to become a very small part of a very vast machine. […] his whole horizon is narrowed.'[103]

Amid this cultural climate, during the first years of the twentieth century many contemporaries reflected upon whether the nineteenth century had been one of progress or failure, and whether urban society was progressing, retrogressing or stagnating. It was a common trope in working-class autobiography of the period: W. E. Adams, for instance, reflected in his 1903 autobiography: 'we are wiser than the ancients, but not more virtuous. We know more, but we do not think more. Our dominion over the physical world is wider and more complete than ever before; but our dominion over the intellectual world is still […] circumscribed'.[104] The biographer of William Morris, J. W. Mackail, wrote in similar emotional terms, in a passage that Masterman selected as the epigraph to *The Heart of the Empire:*

> The uneasy feeling abroad is that the Nineteenth Century, which has done such wonderful things, and from things so much more wonderful were hoped, has been on the whole a failure. Fifty years ago men's minds were full of ideals. Some of them seem to have come to nothing. Others have received a strangely disenchanting fulfilment. Cinder-heaps smoulder where once there were beacon-fires […] With a wider understanding of what a capitalist society involves there seems to have come a dulling of men's consciences.[105]

There is a sense, in contemporary thought, that the age of urbanisation and industrialisation had witnessed technological improvement without concomitant improvement in morals and intellect. That the forces at work in modern urban society were so complex that solutions seemed above the comprehension of contemporary minds – and, indeed, that the condition of modernity itself tended to disillusion and dull keenness of thought. But there is also a sense that people's intellects were misdirected in modern society: either distracted by consumption and amusement, or else focussed upon economic growth at the expense of wider social

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[103] Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (London, Macmillan and Co., 1894), pp.163-8.
[104] Adams was equivocal about his own personal and emotional investment in the question: 'Old people are apt to institute invidious comparisons between the days of their youth and the days of their decline […] But the world cannot always be getting worse. My own opinion is […] that there has been decided improvement in some directions, but decided retrogressions in others.'
W. E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1903), pp.42 and 581.
[105] J. W. Mackail, 'William Morris. A Lecture to the City of London I.L.P', (1901), quoted in Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire,* p.xxiv.

improvement and emotional wellbeing. In social commentary, novels and memoirs, as well as the writings of urban planners, contemporaries across the social scale voiced the objection that – whilst there had been manifest social and technological progress in the modern city – industrial technologies had on the whole been misused, creating and perpetuating social conditions that militated against human happiness. For those that expressed hope for the future direction of cities in modernity, urban improvement lay in the intelligent use of industrial and machine technology, in which the energies of industrial capitalism would be re-shaped by new civic values and new ways of imagining urban life.

Chapter Four – 'Paleotechnic and Neotechnic': Technology and Urban Anxieties

Cultural histories of the late Victorian and Edwardian period – where they do consider attitudes to technology – have tended to emphasise technophobia in intellectual and literary high culture, and the predominance of anxiety towards machinery in the romantic critique of the modern industrial city; more positive or technophilic accounts are generally restricted to studies of artistic and literary modernism.[1] Daniel Wilson has recently written that there is thus an 'awkward ambivalence' as to the place of machinery in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British culture 'that is not so much unresolved as undigested, in part because the question has rarely been subjected to sustained critical attention.'[2] In part, this is due to a historiographical tendency to examine technology in extremely broad terms: as a monolithic concept synonymous with industrialisation and innovation. This chapter argues for a re-evaluation of contemporary attitudes by disentangling these conceptual elisions: drawing a distinction between old and new technologies, between the possibilities of technological innovation and fears of technological determinism, and between technology-as-fact and technology-in-use.

The ubiquity of industrial and machine technology in the modern city inspired paradoxical and contradictory responses in late Victorian and Edwardian literature and culture. Perceptions of the emotional and psychological effects of machine technology in contemporary society, and its role in shaping the cities of the future, cut across conventional intellectual and ideological positions. Attitudes among the political left, from the Arts and Crafts medievalism of William Morris to the technocratic Fabians, were as diverse as they were among political and cultural conservatives. Machine technology simultaneously offered the promise of a solution to urban fears, and was itself productive of anxieties. Technological innovation aroused deep anxieties over the future of humanity in an increasingly mechanised world, and symbolised the destructive forces of modernity and a sense of dislocation; of

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[1] For example, see Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (London: Penguin, 1992); Herbert Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969). For a critical discussion of the historiographical emphasis on technophobia and anti-industrialism in Victorian literature and culture, see Tamara Ketabgian, *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture,* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp.1-14.

[2] Daniel Wilson, 'J. A. Hobson and the Machinery Question', *Journal of British Studies,* 54 (2), 2015, pp.377-8.

living in a new age of transition in which the present bore little relation to the past. Yet technological innovation could reassure contemporaries that liberation from the problems and dangers that had historically been inherent in urban life was possible. Machine technology could seem dehumanising, severing humanity from nature; but also as enabling the evolution of an 'improved' humanity in the technocratic utopias of the future. Whilst an instinctive technophobia that balked at the mere spectacle of machine technology was not uncommon in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, there was also, in much contemporary thought, excitement at human achievement; a sense of wonder occasioned by vast material constructions; sometimes even a romanticising of modern technologies.

Victorian culture has often been identified with a pervasive anti-industrial sentiment, in which machine technologies were condemned for the destruction of human feeling and pre-modern modes of life and work. Victorian fiction in particular has been seen to be characterised by technophobia and the persistence of a rural imaginary.[3] Herbert Sussman, for instance, has argued that Victorian novelists were both unable and unwilling 'to attach any aesthetic or imaginative value to the technological wonders of their time.'[4] Moreover, there has been a historiographical tendency to equate rural nostalgia with a rejection of industrial and technological progress, leading to a kind of confirmation bias among authors who seek to emphasise anti-industrialism in modern British culture.[5] More recently, Tamara Ketabgian has argued against this critical tradition, which 'has typically viewed Victorian literature and high culture as either hostile to or disengaged with industrial life'. She writes that the anti-industrial history of British literature (invoked by F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams, as well as later Marxist and New Historicist accounts of culture) has led to a selection bias in which technophilic or industrial novels are excluded from the canon.[6] Ketabgian highlights, too, a number of recent cultural studies by Joseph Bizup, Jay Clayton, Nicholas Daly and Laura Otis, amongst others, that have sought to contest the division between Victorian high culture and technology.[7] Clayton in particular emphasises

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[3] For example, see F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933); Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), part I.

[4] Herbert Sussman, 'Industrial', in Herbert F. Tucker (ed), *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999), p.254.

[5] For example, Wiener; see also discussion of Wiener's equation of rural nostalgia with anti-industrialism in Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History,* 1 (1), 2004, pp.104-6.

[6] Ketabgian, pp.7-9.

[7] For example, Joseph Bizup, *Manufacturing Culture: Vindications of Early Victorian Industry* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the*

technophilia and technoculture in nineteenth-century literature, tracing the surprising continuities between the convergence of technology and culture in postmodernism and nineteenth-century encounters between literature and science.[8]

Bernhard Rieger has argued that debates over the social and cultural effects of technology in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries were characterised not so much by technophobia or cultural pessimism as by ambivalence. Technological innovations that transformed urban space such as electricity and the railway generated both fervent enthusiasm and profound anxiety. Inventions such as the telegraph, telephone, motor car, aeroplanes, airships, film, photography, the gramophone and the radio struck contemporaries as "miraculous" objects: the "wonders" of the modern age. Equally, though, Rieger writes that technological innovations were 'intellectually and emotionally confusing' to contemporaries: 'throwing contemporaries off balance, technology as a wonder contributed to a pervasive sense of dislocation'. Yet instances of technophobia did not give rise to a cultural atmosphere opposed to change *per se*: such concerns existed within a cultural climate that celebrated progress and innovation – albeit one that was tempered by the presence of deep ambivalence. [9] Rieger challenges what he sees as the historiographical misreading of contemporary discussions of industrial accidents, technological disasters, and risk, arguing that they were not so much expressions of hostility towards technology as 'strategies for containing and transforming anxieties about the consequences of innovation.' In this way, the transference of generalised anxiety surrounding the destructive elements inherent in modernity into specific fears of the 'moral and cultural perils' of specific forms of technology enabled the creation of an emotional landscape broadly conducive to change and innovation.[10] Ambivalence towards technology in late Victorian and Edwardian thought is thus not simply a mixture of technophobic and technophilic attitudes: rather, it is both a coherent ideological position and an emotional coping mechanism for assimilating rapid social and cultural change.

Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century,* (Ann Arbour, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011).
[8] Clayton, pp.3-10.
[9] Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.2-4.
[10] Rieger, pp.16-18.

The chapter proceeds from this understanding of ambivalence, yet it also disentangles the causes of ambivalence in order to re-evaluate late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards technology, which encompassed an extremely broad range of concerns. It is argued that ideological positions were shaped both by the older technologies of the First Industrial Revolution, and by newer technological innovations; prior experience of technological advance conditioned responses to new technologies. On the one hand, late nineteenth- and early twentieth century critics already had an experience of technological innovation to build upon, and inherited strategies for assimilating rapid technological change from previous generations' experience of industrialisation. On the other, the technological innovations of the First Industrial Revolution had left a huge and burdensome endowment of, literally, bricks and mortar; of smoke, dirt, coal soot, and an untidy urban landscape overcrowded with jerry-built and already decaying housing. One reflex was to take refuge – either physically in the suburbs or countryside, or imaginatively in escapist nostalgia for rural Olde England. The alternative impulse was to 'clean up' the urban environment, by harnessing these same industrial technologies towards social improvement, or else supersede it by using new technologies to build bigger and better.

Moreover, attitudes were shaped not only by machine technologies as material artefacts, to be celebrated or objected to on aesthetic grounds, but also by technology-in-use: the purposes to which technology was put under the logic of industrial capitalism. In particular, the chapter argues for a re-evaluation of critics such as William Morris, Edward Carpenter, Charles Ashbee, and G. M. Trevelyan, who are often identified as technophobic or anti-industrial. Yet none of these authors were opposed to technology as a matter of principle: their anxieties stemmed from perceptions of the misdirection of technology in industrial society, and a concern to redirect the possibilities of technology towards proper use. At the same time, it is argued that Edwardian critics such as H. G. Wells and Patrick Geddes, who sought to reconcile the Romantic ideal of 'joy in labour' with the utilitarian imperatives of urban-industrial society, laid the ideological foundations for interwar critiques which sought to re-enchant technology-oriented work.[11] The final section of the chapter will turn away from this high-cultural ambivalence towards technology, and will interrogate the 'view from below'. It contrasts working-class autobiographical writing to oral history transcripts of interviews with industrial workers reflecting upon the opening years of the twentieth century, in order to

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[11] For interwar developments, see Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. ch.4.

consider how workers themselves related to conditions of life and work that were mediated by industrial machinery.

Technology and the 'Machinery Question'

A cultural history of technology in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries requires two broad points of conceptual clarification. The first is to define the object of historiographical enquiry, and to consider what is meant by the term 'technology'. As David Edgerton writes, the historiography of technology has often conflated technological innovation with technology itself, in the sense of the technologies that are prevalent and in widespread use in a given society. Social, economic and cultural histories of modern Britain conventionally view late Victorian and Edwardian era as characterised by the technologies of the Second Industrial Revolution: electricity, telegraphy, the underground railway, the motor car, and so on. Yet, as Edgerton reminds us, older technologies survived – and indeed thrived – in ways that have often escaped historiographical attention.[12] This chapter uses Edgerton's insights to complicate our understanding of contemporary attitudes towards technology in the modern industrial city, in which the old existed alongside the new. In this sense, anxieties could be generated as much by the continued prevalence of older technologies as by technological innovation. By the late nineteenth-century, the older technologies born of the First Industrial Revolution (that had seemed so shocking to early nineteenth-century observers) could appear to contemporaries as at once familiar, normalised and domesticated, and as inefficient and polluting; relics of an earlier age that threatened to obstruct the process of urban improvement. Yet technological advancement did not always appear to contemporaries as benign: innovations could be envisaged as insidious, isolating, antihuman, or dystopian.

The second conceptual difficulty presented by a cultural history of technology is that the term 'technology', in our current understanding of the word, is itself anachronistic. In its

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[12] Edgerton writes, for instance: 'steam power, held to be characteristic of the industrial revolution, was not only absolutely but relatively more important in 1900 than in 1800'; 'Twentieth-century horse power was not a left-over from a pre-mechanical era; the gigantic horse-drawn metropolis of 1900 was new. In Britain, the most industrialised nation in the world in 1900, the use of horses for transportation peaked not in the early nineteenth century but in the early years of the twentieth.' David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2008), pp.xxi and 33.

current English form, 'technology' did not exist before circa 1900, and its use did not become widespread until at least the inter-war years.[13] In the late Victorian and Edwardian period, discussion of the social and cultural impact of machine technologies often took place within the discourse of 'machinery'. The intellectual origins of this discourse were in the "machinery question" of the early nineteenth century, a question that was framed in holistic terms around the effects of what we now call technology upon the whole of human life. Within this nineteenth-century discourse of machinery, machines themselves were elided with the 'machinery' of politics and economics, as part of a wider critique of materialism, utilitarianism and industrial society. Furthermore, this holistic approach produced among critics of industrialism (most notably Thomas Carlyle, who characterised the period as the 'Age of Machinery') a cultural critique of the machine in which the machine as a technical fact and the machine as social metaphor coalesced.[14] In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries, the machinery question was reopened by social commentators and cultural critics – most notably William Morris, J. A. Hobson, and Arnold Toynbee – who produced ethical analyses of mechanisation that were intertwined with a critique of the structure of industrial society, and who hoped to reform the relation of human and machine.[15]

In this sense, machines could become charged with symbolic significance in contemporary intellectual and literary thought – opposed to definitions of 'organic' and 'culture'. As Raymond Williams demonstrated, the emergence of the modern understanding of culture itself was rooted from the start in a critique of industrialism.[16] The nineteenth century's canonical high cultural critics (Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Morris, Pater, and so on) attacked industrial society on the grounds that it was felt to be threatening certain human values and qualities of living best embodied by the arts. Culture, as an abstraction grounded in an holistic idea of the harmonious development of humanity's higher faculties, was defined against 'mechanism' – in all senses of the word – as part of the wider critique of the utilitarian values of industrial capitalism. The machine thus became at once cause, effect and symbol of human life under the conditions of industrial society, in which many cultural

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[13] David Edgerton, 'Innovation, Technology, or History: What is the Historiography of Technology About?', *Technology and Culture,* 51 (3), 2010, pp.683-4, and Wilson, 'Hobson', pp.383.

[14] Williams, part I; Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy*, 1815–1848 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp.2-3.

[15] Wilson, 'Hobson', p376, and Daniel Wilson, 'Arnold Toynbee and the Industrial Revolution: The Science of History, Political Economy and the Machine Past', *History & Memory,* 26 (2), 2014, pp.133.

[16] Williams, pp.xiv-xvi.

critics feared that human beings themselves, shaped by the dictates of industrial machinery, were taking on the characters of machines.

Yet the predominance of this cultural critique of the machine in contemporary intellectual and literary culture is often overestimated. Ketabgian argues that the historiography of what she terms the 'tragic humanist narratives' of anti-industrialism in Victorian high culture has a tendency to 'treat industrialism as an extremely broad concern, more synonymous with social and historical change than with any specific engagement – material or symbolic – with the machine.'[17] The very capaciousness of the nineteenth-century discourse of 'machinery' is thus seen to have a distorting effect on intellectual history, leading to an overemphasis on technophobia. Moreover, it has obscured conceptual differences between materialism, machinery, and machines themselves. The romantic critique of the utilitarian and materialist values of industrialism, in opposing definitions of culture to machinery, could generate novel and surprising counter-reactions that sought to reconcile notions of culture with the ubiquity of industrial technology. Oscar Wilde, for example, argued with characteristic iconoclasm that culture itself depended on machinery. For Wilde, culture and civilisation were predicated upon the drudgery of slaves: 'unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible.' Yet proper use of machines might liberate humanity – 'the machines will be the new slaves'.[18] Wilde himself railed against the conceptual elision entailed by the romantic critique of industrialism, which lined up materialism, machinery and machines, on the one hand, against idealist notions of culture and art on the other: 'men […] rage against Materialism, as they call it, forgetting that there has been no material improvement that has not spiritualised the world.'[19]

Moreover, the conflation of 'machinery' with 'machines' themselves has produced selective ways of reading canonical anti-industrial texts. William Morris, for instance, is often held to typify the development of the romantic anti-industrial critique in the late nineteenth century. For Morris, 'machinery' was set against 'art', and art in turn defined a quality of living which it was the whole purpose of political change to make possible. Yet it is a misreading to assume that Morris was thus opposed to machines as a matter of principle. He was in favour of labour-saving devices where hardship or mere dullness was concerned,

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[17] Ketabgian, pp.6-8.
[18] Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' (1891), in *Essays* (London: Meuthen, 1950), p.245.
[19] Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *Essays,* p.125.

but condemned the uses to which machines were put under industrial capitalism.[20] Indeed, as this chapter will argue, the anxieties of cultural critics, novelists and social commentators generally focussed upon *proper use* of technology, and concerns over waste, inefficiency and misdirected energies. To be sure, there was much anxiety surrounding technological determinism, isolation and alienation, but there was also in much contemporary literature and social commentary a widespread recognition that technology was an amoral force; its problems reflected the problems of urban-industrial social organisation, whilst its promises might liberate contemporaries from present-day conditions.

Technology in Use

Much of the ambivalence towards machine technology among late Victorian and Edwardian cultural critics, social commentators and reformers stemmed from the awareness that technology was essentially amoral in nature. At stake, therefore, was not whether technological innovation was to be welcomed or rejected; the task was to reconfigure the relationship between human and machine: to put machines in service to humanity, rather than substituting for it. For Charles Ashbee, any hope of urban reform lay in the recognition that 'machinery is neither all good nor all bad. An intelligent community will distinguish which is which.'[21] Ashbee's 'New Civics' would be founded on this distinction: 'a community having finer ideals must be built up on a proper understanding of mechanical power.'[22] Though less optimistic about the future prospects of urban civilisation, G. M. Trevelyan expressed a similar sentiment in his formulation of machinery as 'neutral Titans', whose power might be used to 'alter mankind for good or for evil.'[23] For Ashbee as well as Trevelyan, anxieties stemmed not from the brute fact of technology, or its ubiquity in modern life, but from the *uses* to which technology was put under the logic of industrial capitalism. Trevelyan wrote of the neutral 'Titan forces' of innovation in locomotion and production that, 'instead of being chained to the chariot of virtue and intelligence they have been let loose on the world – the blind foolish Titans […] which as yet have wrought in many ways harm to the soul of man.'

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[20] Clive Wilmer, 'Introduction', in William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.xxii

[21] C. R. Ashbee, *Where the Great City Stands: A Study in the New Civics* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1917), p.3.

[22] Ashbee, p.95.

[23] G. M. Trevelyan, 'Past and Future', in Charles Masterman (ed), *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp.411 and 415.

Whilst this *mis*use of technology was the cause of contemporary anxieties, hopes for the future lay in the intelligent direction of machine technology towards social reform: 'if only men will use the forces of machinery and industry to combat those grave evils which these very forces are now creating by process of economic law.' [24]

This sense of misdirected energies in society, under the logic of industrial capitalism, became magnified by the economies of scale made possible by technological innovation. For Trevelyan, machinery had 'fallen into the hands of commercial interests', who had been 'allowed to alter the whole manner of the life of mankind without respect to any standard save that of making money.' [25] Technology, misdirected into laissez-faire profit making, seemed to generate devastating effects that self-perpetuated under that same logic. In Morris's utopian fable, *News from Nowhere,* the future inhabitants of England reflect upon the nineteenth century that 'in the last age of civilisation men had got into a vicious circle in the matter of production of wares.' The world-market,

> once set a-going, forced them to go on making more and more of these wares, whether they needed them or not. […] By all this they burdened themselves with a prodigious system of mass work merely for the sake of keeping their wretched system going […] the ceaseless endeavour to expend the least possible amount of labour on any article made, and yet at the same time to make as many articles as possible. To this "cheapening of production", as it was called, everything was sacrificed.[26]

To a utopian socialist such as Morris, this subjection of human happiness to the demands of industrial machinery in the name of economic gain was bound to strike one as absurd. Yet, increasingly, contemporary observers expressed the sense that this 'cheapening of production' entailed by the productive capacities of industrial technology was not only an ethical, but also an *economic* disaster. In his study of machine production, *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism,* the economist J. A. Hobson referred to machinery as 'the efficient cause of industrial disease', believing overproduction to have stimulated the economic depression of the 1890s.[27] Moreover, the failure to regulate the productive capacities of industrial technologies had been an environmental disaster that both destroyed the beauty of the countryside and created ugly, polluted and unsanitary urban conditions. Ruskin, famously,

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[24] Trevelyan, p.409.

[25] Trevelyan, p.415.

[26] Morris, *News from Nowhere,* pp.123-4.

[27] J. A. Hobson, *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism: A Study of Machine Production* (1894; London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1917), p.288. See also Wilson, 'Hobson', pp.387-9.

wrote of the 'storm-cloud of the nineteenth century' in drawing a causative link between the economic self-interest of industrialists and environmental pollution.[28] Patrick Geddes created an image of the squandering of natural as well as human resources in industrial society as a pointless and self-sustaining exercise in waste:

> we make it our prime endeavour to dig up coals, to run machinery, to produce cheap cotton, to produce cheap people, to get up more coals, to run more machinery, and so on, and all this essentially towards "extending markets". […] But all this has been with no adequate development of real wealth, as primarily of houses and gardens, still less of towns and cities worth speaking of: our industry but maintains and multiplies our poor and dull existence.[29]

The image of waste as a metaphor for the nature of industrial society pervaded late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual and literary thought. For the protagonist of H. G. Wells' *Tono-Bungay*, industrial capitalism appeared as 'all one spectacle of forces running to waste, of people who use and do not replace […] a wasting aimless fever of trade and money-making.'[30] For Charles Masterman, 'the impression finally retained' of the modern industrial city was 'not of the positive misery or ugliness, but the egregious *waste* of it all – waste as in the working of some clumsily contrived machinery producing the minimum of result from the maximum of effort.'[31] In his hopes for urban reform via the intelligent control of mechanical power, Charles Ashbee quoted Edward Carpenter's dream of 'drop[ping] in one inspired moment the whole mad sequence of cut-throat rivalry, insane waste, disgusting fraud, and inane uselessness, which constitute modern industry.'[32] Ashbee, too, indicted the industrial system for 'using and wasting so much human labour', and lamented the waste of resources under the machine logic of industrial production:

> The poor, the rich, the middle class, are all alike wasteful – wasteful of the amenities, of the health-giving, the life-giving things – wasteful of beauty […] We do not need all these dead mechanical things that are ever being thrust upon us by Ill-organised Industry. Our misuse of mechanical power has brought us, rich and poor alike, a wrong way of looking at life. […]

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[28] John Ruskin, *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century: Two Lectures Delivered at the London Institution, February 4ᵗʰ and 11ᵗʰ 1884* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1884).

[29] Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1915), p.74.

[30] H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (1909; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), p.346.

[31] Charles Masterman 'Realities at Home', in *The Heart of the Empire*, p.48.

[32] Edward Carpenter, 'My Days and Dreams' quoted in Ashbee, p.150.

> But the waste is not where we think it. The greatest waste is spiritual and human. All stuff that is made for sale rather than service, all stuff that in the making numbs or destroys a man, is *ipso facto* waste.[33]

The misdirection of technological innovation was seen to have created a society characterised by waste and inefficiency: one that was at once wasteful of human labour and careless of human value.

For Ashbee, the 'New Civics' would 'free the human spirit again […] from the incubus of mechanism – of power misunderstood, misapplied, miscontrolled'; 'we must free the individual from the machine.'[34] Yet the solution did not lie in the abandonment of machine technology, but in the reformation of the relation between human and machine. He argued that whilst 'man's control of mechanical power has yet to be made effective', the prospect of urban reform necessitated 'the discovering of means whereby mechanical power may be best used in the public service.' This would require machinery to be 'socialised, and not merely used to enable men to exploit each other.'[35] It was a theme echoed by Carpenter, who wrote that in an ideal society, mechanical means of production 'would not be refused; but they will have to be brought into subjection.' Carpenter is often remembered as an anti-industrialist of the sandal-wearing, handicrafts and back-to-the-land type, but he, like Morris, was equivocal about the ethical status of industrial machinery. It was not a question of denying the value of labour-saving devices in society, but of redistributing relations of power: 'man will use them, instead of their using him.'[36] Trevelyan, too, though he lamented the destruction by industrial machinery of older modes of life and work, recognised the impossibility of abandoning technology in modern society. For Trevelyan, who was in many ways immensely susceptible to rural nostalgia and the romanticised idealisation of rural Olde England, 'salvation' did not 'lie backwards in vain regret'; it would consist in 'deflecting the Titan forces [of technological innovation] with which the modern world is armed from purely economic to partly ideal ends.'[37] Innovations such as electricity, for instance, had the potential to transform the polluted and smoke-laden atmosphere of industrial cities. Indeed, Trevelyan emphasised that, paradoxically, 'the way back to Nature herself lies now through dextrous use of Artifice and modern inventions towards that end': industrial technologies such as the

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[33] Ashbee, p.91.
[34] Ashbee, pp.21 and 57.
[35] Ashbee, p.4.
[36] Edward Carpenter, 'Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure', in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays* (1889; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1921), p.68.
[37] Trevelyan, p.410.

railway network enabled town-dwellers, however briefly, to access the pleasures of the countryside. Technological innovations, if applied to efforts for social reform, might be 'infinitely strong [forces] for good.'[38]

Paleotechnic and Neotechnic

In his enormously influential study of urban planning, *Cities in Evolution,* Patrick Geddes characterised the 'industrial age' as 'twofold': just as the Stone Age was divided into two periods of technological advancement, paleolithic and neolithic, so the use of industrial technologies in modern society required partition into two phases.[39] For Geddes, the early twentieth-century city was poised between two phases in human development, in which the 'paleotechnic' technologies characteristic of the present and recent industrial past were being superseded by the 'neotechnic' innovation of the present and future. This was not just a distinction between the adoption of different technologies, but of distinct technological mind-sets, and the different ways in which the possibilities of technological innovation were utilised in society. The paleotechnic age was characterised not just by the technologies of the first industrial revolution which were starting to become obsolete (inefficient, cumbersome, noisy, polluting, coal-burning, and so on), but of the inefficient and myopic application of industrial technology towards 'individual money gains.' The 'paleotechnic mind' was 'associated with the waste and dissipation of the stupendous resources of energy and materials, and power of using them'; 'as dissipating resources and energies, as depressing life, under the rule of machine and mammon'.[40] In contrast, in the nascent Neotechnic order, the technologies as well as the values of laissez-faire industrial capitalism would be superseded by technological innovations that focused upon conserving energy and maximising physical efficiency, as well as the re-organisation of the urban environment towards the maintenance of civic life.

Geddes both criticised the romantic critique of industrialism for its naivety and condemned 'mechanical utilitarians' for their indifference towards the drudgery of industrial labour, but he conceptualised these as twin intellectual responses to the shock of rapid early

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[38] Trevelyan, pp.405-6.
[39] Geddes, p.60.
[40] Geddes, pp.60 and 72-3.

industrialisation. The innovations of the coming neotechnic age would render the extremities of both ideological positions obsolete:

> Both have failed to see, beyond the rude present, the better future now dawning – in which the applied physical sciences are advancing beyond their clumsy and noisy first apprenticeship, with its wasteful and dirty beginnings, towards a finer skill, a more subtle and more economic mastery of natural energies; and in which these, moreover, are increasingly supplemented by a corresponding advance of the organic sciences, with their new valuations of life, organic as well as human.[41]

Geddes, like Trevelyan, believed that this reformation of the relation between human and machine would, in turn, reform the relation between man and nature that had been fractured by the scientific and industrial revolutions: 'neotechnic use brings with it potentialities of wealth and leisure beyond past Utopian dreams […] better use of resources and population towards the bettering of man and his environment together.'[42] His vision of urban reform was one in which machine technology would be combined with access to nature. The task was to improve physical and emotional wellbeing in cities by restoring this organic relationship between man and environment: a relationship that would be mediated by technological innovation.

Anxieties about machine technology were not necessarily about the consequences of technological innovation, but often centred on the continued prevalence of older technologies and ways of using them that threatened to obstruct the process of urban improvement. Even amongst authors whose attitudes might be described as technophilic, there was deep anxiety surrounding the limitations of industrial technologies. In his vision of a technocratic utopia, for instance, H. G. Wells envisaged the elimination of polluting industrial machinery: 'it is unlikely there will be any smoke-disgorging steam-railway trains in Utopia, they are already doomed on earth, already threatened with […] obsolescence.'[43] When the narrator of *A Modern Utopia* returns to Edwardian London, he is struck by the 'uproar of vehicles', the dirt-littered asphalt, and the polluting waste of industrial technologies. Francis Wheen writes that 'one of Wells's abiding obsessions was the sheer grubbiness of London, a city of smoke and horse-shit.'[44] Wells, too, understood technological innovation to be essentially amoral in nature; his anxiety was that industrial society had failed to comprehend the possibilities of its

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[41] Geddes, p.66.
[42] Geddes, p.72.
[43] H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (1905; London: Penguin, 2005), p.37.
[44] Francis Wheen, 'Introduction', in *A Modern Utopia,* p.xiv.

use. Just as Geddes offered a twofold critique of technological innovation and technology-in-use, Wells critiqued both old technologies and old ways of using them. There is a passage in *A Modern Utopia* that might be considered as Wells's intervention into the 'machinery question':

> The plain message physical science has for the world at large is this, that were our political and social and moral devices only as well contrived to their ends as a linotype machine, an antiseptic operating plant, or an electric-tram car, there need now at the present moment be no appreciable toil in the world, and only the smallest fraction of the pain, the fear and the anxiety that now makes human life so doubtful in its value. There is more than enough for everyone alive. Science stands, a competent servant, behind her wrangling underbred masters, holding out resources, devices and remedies they are too stupid to use.[45]

Wells, here, disentangles machines from the discourse of machinery, and inverts the romantic critique of social and political machinery in the traditional sense with a kind of deliberately provocative iconoclasm. The problem with 'political and social and moral devices' is not that this machinery of modern life obeys the mechanistic logic of utilitarianism; it is precisely that it does *not*. Scientific rationalism is seen to have only gone half way: scientific progress had produced smoothly running and efficient machines, and yet these machines were clumsily operated within a social order that not only failed to grasp the emancipatory possibility of machines, but had failed to reform itself according to the same scientific logic.

Of course, the kind of radical scientism expressed here by Wells departed considerably from the ideological sympathies of the preceding authors in this chapter – Ashbee, Geddes, Carpenter, Morris, Trevelyan, and so on – whose views ranged from anti-industrial romanticism and back-to-the-land socialism to urbane cosmopolitanism. Yet in their prescriptions for urban and social reform, none of these authors expressed unequivocal technophobia in the traditional sense, if we understand technophobia to mean an instinctive fear of advanced technology, or dislike of complex devices. Their anxieties were of a more pragmatic kind, and surrounded the proper use of technologies: the ways in which machines had been used to generate and then perpetuate the ethical failures of the industrial revolution, and the ways in which the nineteenth century had largely failed to grasp the emancipatory potential of technological innovations. But all these authors shared the essential belief that, if mind-sets could be changed, machine technologies would transform industrial society for the

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[45] Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.73.

better. There was a basic faith that the intelligent application of technological innovations would correct the problems of the modern industrial city: namely, problems that had themselves been caused by the misuse of technology towards economic gain at the expense of human happiness.

Yet this very optimism surrounding the role of technology in the process of urban improvement generated a new kind of anxiety in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Hopes for the future direction of cities were pinned upon the possibility of the intelligent control of machines: the harnessing of mechanical power towards ideal ends. Yet the requirement that a technological society demanded concerted, continual and sustained efforts toward the intelligent and purposive direction of machine technology created a double burden that was itself productive of anxieties. As Leo Marx argued in *The Machine in the Garden,* over the course of the nineteenth century the city's incursion into the countryside was, for the first time in history, an irreparable, *technological* one.[46] In a modern industrial society, the functioning of both country and city became (inter)dependent upon the seamless functioning of a network of technologies – of production, locomotion and communication. David Edgerton makes a related point in reflecting upon the history of technology in the twentieth century: 'the price of artificial complexity', he writes, is 'eternal vigilance'.[47] This is perhaps what Trevelyan meant when he wrote, in uncharacteristically radical terms, of the necessity of 'deflecting the Titan forces' of machinery: 'we must then make the new world ourselves, its very outward aspect as well as its inner life. In the future nothing will take care of itself, and no nation again will ever "muddle through," or succeed in "a fit of absence of mind," either in material things or in things of higher import.'[48] The artificial-rational systems of a technological society cannot be built and then left alone; they require constant attention, maintenance, rebuilding and repair. For Edgerton, this generates imaginative as well as very real anxieties:

> One of the most enduring ideas about technology in the twentieth century suggests that the essentially human has been taken over by the artificial. Nightmares about the breakdown of the complex world of artifice that makes modern life possible propel

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[46] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); See also discussion of Marx in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 'From "Great Town" to "Nonplace Urban Realm"', in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (eds) *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art and Literature* (New York: Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, 1983), p.14.
[47] Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old,* p.76.
[48] Trevelyan, p.411.

deep concerns about the need for discipline, order and stability to keep the system going.[49]

In this sense, the fact of modern society's dependence on machine technology can entail the transference of imaginative power, in which machines become endowed with a sense of agency. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hopes for the future control and direction of mechanical power existed in parallel to anxieties that machines themselves exerted a controlling influence: a kind of imaginative technological determinism in which machines, if not controlled, would begin to do the controlling.

There is a sense, in the writings of social theorists and cultural commentators as well as imaginative literature, that urbanisation and industrialisation entailed a process by which human beings had become subjected to the machines they had created. Machines could be envisaged at once as inhuman/antihuman, and as diabolical creations that had taken on an agency of their own under the logic of industrial capitalism. Hobson, for instance, indicted industrial fiction for its tendency to attribute the plight of workers to evil or negligent bosses. For Hobson, this missed the mark – it was machines themselves that had come to exert the controlling force:

> The chief material agency and instrument of change has been machinery. Machinery has become the autocrat of modern industry, not only determining what work shall be done, how it shall be done, and who shall do it, but fixing the conditions of life for the workers, making modern towns, and stamping the conditions of machine-made towns upon the character of the nation.[50]

Daniel Wilson has identified a similar sense of mechanical agency in Arnold Toynbee's lectures on the Industrial Revolution, in which the machine 'was presented as the autonomous agent of irreversible change.'[51] Indeed, the writings of Toynbee, Hobson and Trevelyan (as well as the alternating utopianism and dystopianism of Wells) all share the same basic uncertainty as to the status of agency in the relation between human and machine. Their pragmatic belief in the possibilities of social reform sits uneasily with their imaginative endowment of machines with a mind of their own. Machines are at once conceptualised as tools for human use – Ashbee's 'dead mechanical things' – and as monstrous, almost

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[49] Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old,* pp.75-6.
[50] J. A. Hobson, 'The Ethics of Industrialism: A Diagnosis', in Stanton Coit (ed), *Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), pp.82-3.
[51] Arnold Toynbee, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1908), and Wilson, 'Arnold Toynbee', p.140.

animate, controlling forces. Whilst optimism could be maintained through a belief in the possibilities of better technologies and better ways of living, this progressive optimism surrounding the relation between human and machine rested upon a fine balance that was easily tipped towards dystopian visions of demonic machines, or the loss of control over technology.

This transfer of agency from the owners and creators of machines to the machine itself entailed two imaginative consequences. Firstly, it was suggestive of enslavement to machines, as if machines themselves had become the new taskmasters. Secondly, it produced a sense of the loss of individualism in modern society: that as people became dependent on technology, they themselves were taking on the characteristics of automata. Moreover, if the coal-burning machines of the paleotechnic age were envisaged as monstrous taskmasters exerting demands on human labour, the technologies of the neotechnic future – because their mode of operation was more difficult to discern – could be imagined as all the more insidious. This distinction between the status of old and new technologies, and anxieties surrounding their agency, is at the heart of ambivalent responses towards the role of technology in the modern city. One the one hand, technological innovations might be used to liberate industrial society from self-perpetuating enslavement to the productive demands of machinery. On the other, the more complex and smoothly running mechanical technologies of the immediate future (frictionless, electrical, telegraphic) might come to direct and dominate human life in ever more subtle, insinuating ways.

The Labour Question

Anxieties over the effects of machine technology upon social and emotional life were often framed around debates surrounding the nature and purpose of human labour. Contemporary observers were faced with a central paradox: technological innovation had the potential to free humanity from physical labour, and yet industrialisation had tended in actuality to replace traditional modes of handicraft and manual labour with a new kind of drudgery. Industrial labour itself was seen to be mechanical in nature, and was productive of anxieties that industrial workers themselves were taking on the character of machines. Urban inhabitants, too, appeared governed by the technologies that regulated urban space. In George

Gissing's *The Nether World,* for instance, human beings move through city streets 'driven automaton-like by forces they neither understood nor could resist.'[52] Michael Freeman has written that the railway provided a master image for the lives of suburbanites in the Victorian imagination. Suburban commuters could appear to contemporary observers as regulated by the machine rationality of clock and railway: 'by day they streamed into the centre to work; by night they submitted to a reverse spatial logic as they redistributed themselves for rest.'[53]

Whilst Oscar Wilde, for one, hoped that technological improvement would spiritualise the world by freeing the labouring classes from drudgery and enabling them to cultivate their higher faculties, there was also a widespread sense of technological determinism, in which the pervasiveness of technology was envisaged as dulling these same faculties, and destroying a kind of vital, essential humanity. Such hopes and anxieties are best dramatised by contrasting views of the role of physical labour, and the relation between human and machine, in utopian and dystopian fiction. The following section considers two very different visions of the future, from William Morris and H. G. Wells, as an entry point into contrasting views of the desirability of manual labour in modern society.

In William Morris's vision of utopia in *News from Nowhere* (1890), the future inhabitants of England represent the Ruskinian idea that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour. As we have seen, contrary to popular belief, Morris did not entirely reject the labour-saving potential of machinery. He argued that, under the conditions of industrial capitalism, machines were used solely to increase production at the expense of human happiness; machine production had increased the worker's drudgery, creating mindless and repetitive conditions of labour. Morris' utopians thus inform the time-travelling narrator that 'all work which would be irksome to do by hand is done by immensely improved machinery; and in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without.'[54] As Clive Wilmer writes, the idea of pleasure in work was central to Morris' conception of the ideal society: 'how else in a post-Christian world was human life to acquire purpose and significance?'[55]

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[52] George Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.280.
[53] Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999), p.134.
[54] Morris, *News from Nowhere,* p.127.
[55] Wilmer, 'Introduction', in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings,* p.xxxv.

At stake in the question of the relation between human labour and machine production was the recovery of joy in a modern industrial age. Charles Ashbee, for instance, wrote that 'we have now to find a means for man to labour again with his hands – not mechanically, but inventively, imaginatively – to labour with the motive of joy.'[56] Edward Carpenter envisaged that if relations of power between human and machine were reversed so that machine production was put to the service of humanity, then 'Joy would descend upon life, and the ordinary occupations would become free, spontaneous, and beautiful.'[57] Ashbee, Carpenter and Morris were all heavily influenced by Ruskin, and shared his faith in the redemptive pleasures of work. At the heart of their Arts and Crafts ruralist-socialist sympathies was an aesthetic philosophy of labour derived from Ruskin, in which the aesthetic was inextricable from the social. The 'higher arts' of architecture, painting, and sculpture were intertwined with the 'lesser arts' of decorative artistry, craftwork and hand production. For Morris, in an ideal society, workmen would be considered artists; for 'what is an artist but a workman who is determined that, whatever else happens, his work shall be excellent.'[58] In this sense, both art and work shared an almost theological significance: in *News from Nowhere,* the future inhabitants of England tell the narrator that 'the reward of labour is *life*. Is that not enough? […] The rewards of creation. The wages which God gets, as people might have said in time agone.'[59]

In contrast, in Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), which was written in part in opposition to *News from Nowhere,* the central purpose of utopia was to free humanity from physical labour. For Wells, it was almost laughable to imagine that, given the right social conditions, the working classes might be made to enjoy their labour:

> there is – as in Morris and the outright Return-to-Nature Utopians – a bold-make believe that all toil may be made a joy […] But indeed this is against all the observed behaviour of mankind. It needed the Olympian unworldliness of an irresponsible rich man of the shareholding type, a Ruskin or a Morris playing at life, to imagine as much.[60]

Indeed, for Wells, a utopian society depended on the mechanisation of industry, and 'the hope that all routine work may be made automatic.' The technological innovations of the

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[56] Ashbee, p.21
[57] Carpenter, from 'My Days and Dreams', quoted in Ashbee, p.150.
[58] Morris, 'The Lesser Arts' (1882), in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings.*
[59] Morris, *News from Nowhere,* p.122. See also discussion of Ruskin's and Morris's philosophies of labour in John Hughes, *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp.116-8.
[60] Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.72.

nineteenth century were to be celebrated; Wells envisaged that 'it is becoming conceivable […] that a labouring class – that is to say a class of workers without personal initiative – will become unnecessary to the world of men.'[61] Patrick Geddes, too, though he was in many ways intellectually indebted to Ruskin and Morris, critiqued the otherworldly idealism of their distaste for contemporary conditions of work and productive labour:

> They were too largely romantics – right in their world's treasuring of the past, yet wrong in their reluctance, sometimes even passionate refusal, to admit the claims and needs of the present to live and labour in its turn, and according to its lights. So that they too in great measure but brought upon themselves that savage retort and war-cry of "Yah! Sentiment!" with which the would-be utilitarian has so often increased his reckless towards Nature, and coarsened his callousness to art.[62]

For Geddes, this idealism had created an impasse between romanticism and the values of industrial capitalism: the romantic reluctance to face the realities of the urban and industrial present was matched by the refusal of the more pragmatically-minded to recognise humanity's genuine, essential need for the beauty of art and nature.

  At the root of these diverse conceptualisations of the relation between machine production and human labour and happiness was, in turn, the relation between machine technology and art: the question of whether a society dependent on machine technology was capable of both creating and valuing beauty. The romantic critique of industrialism tended to extrapolate a series of oppositions from the dichotomy of 'natural' vs 'artificial', so that nature – as the embodiment of all that was good – came to be the sole province of art and beauty, and the sole source of human value. Wells, as well as Geddes, sought to complicate this dichotomy, and to move beyond the impasse of utilitarianism and romanticism. As Simon James has written of Wells' aesthetics, Wells was often critical of the romantic view of nature, and 'happy to murder romantic tropes in order to dissect them' in his wider writing.[63] It was one thing to experience personal enjoyment of nature and natural beauty; quite another to glibly quote Wordsworth in defence of anti-urbanism, as Wells discusses in *Mankind and the Making*:

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[61] Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.73.
[62] Geddes, pp.92-3. Indeed, Geddes wrote a polemical pamphlet, *John Ruskin: Economist* (1884), which has been viewed as an 'eccentric' and 'notably materialist' attempt 'to assimilate Ruskin to the latest science'. Simon Dentith, *Nineteenth-Century British Literature Then and Now: Reading with Hindsight* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.112.
[63] Simon James *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity and the End of Culture,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.15.

this nature, as they [the Romantics] present it, is really not nature at all, but a factitious admiration for certain isolated aspects of the universe conventionally regarded as "natural." […] Trees, rivers, flowers, birds, stars—are, and have been for many centuries Nature—so are ploughed fields—really the most artificial of things […] A grassy old embankment to protect low-lying fields is Nature, and so is all the mass of apparatus about a water-mill; a new embankment to store an urban water supply, though it may be one mass of splendid weeds, is artificial and ugly,[64]

James notes that Wells's antipathy towards the romantic valorisation of nature reflected his increasing hostility towards the over-idealisation of the high aesthetic culture of the past, not least because such nostalgia failed to address aspects of the urban present and future.[65] Of course, Wells found much to condemn in the modern industrial city's destruction of the beauties of nature. He disliked the ugliness of industrial sprawl, the senselessness of unregulated jerry-building, and the failure of industrial society to recognise human value, but he did not equate this with a rejection of urbanisation and technological innovation *per se.* In *A Modern Utopia,* Wells railed against industrial ugliness, but wrote:

> There is nothing in machinery, there is nothing in embankments and railways and iron bridges and engineering devices to oblige them to be ugly. Ugliness is the measure of imperfection; a thing of human making is for the most part ugly in proportion to the poverty of its constructive thought, to the failure of its producer fully to grasp the purpose of its being.[66]

For Wells, in Utopia engineers would also be artists, allying art with science in the pursuit of beauty. To view the engineer as 'a sort of anti-artist, to count every man who makes things with his unaided thumbs as an artist and every man who uses machinery as a brute' was, for Wells 'merely a passing phase of human stupidity.'[67] If people were to derive happiness and satisfaction from their work, it would not be through a return to manual labour, but through the creation of beautiful machines.

This seems to be a conscious inversion of Morris's vision of utopia, in which 'machine after machine was quietly dropped under the excuse that the machines could not produce works of art, and that works of art were more and more called for.'[68] Yet Wells's view that industrial technologies 'are ugly primarily because our social organisation is ugly' bears a

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[64] Wells, *Mankind in the Making* (1903), quoted in James, pp.14-15.
[65] James, p.15.
[66] H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* pp.78-9.
[67] Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.79.
[68] Morris, *News from Nowhere,* p.201.

striking resemblance to Morris' thought. Wells's understanding of the pursuit of beauty as a process of social improvement, in which the aesthetic and the utilitarian are intertwined, was of course a key tenet of the Arts and Crafts movement; which in other aspects was just the kind of pseudo-medieval, bogusly folkloric brand of romanticism that Wells rejected. For Wells, this distinction entailed a difference of emphasis. It was 'the misfortune of machinery, and not its fault' that industrialists failed to recognise the value of art and beauty, and had instead created an urban environment characterised by ugliness:

> Art, like some beautiful plant, lives in its atmosphere, and when the atmosphere is good it will grow everywhere, and when it is bad nowhere. If we smashed and buried every machine, every furnace, every factory in the world, and without any further change set ourselves to home industries, hand labour, spade husbandry, sheepfolding and pig minding, we should still do things in the same haste, and achieve nothing but dirtiness, inconvenience, bad air and another gaunt and gawky reflection of our intellectual and moral disorder. We should mend nothing.[69]

Michael Saler has written that during the interwar years, progressivists within the Arts and Crafts movement sought to make the thought of Ruskin and Morris relevant to the conditions of the twentieth century, by reconciling industrial mass production with the ideal of 'joy in labour'.[70] The aim of these 'medieval modernists', in Saler's terminology, was to re-enchant machine production by emphasising the potential of machine technologies to be 'man's newer instrument of Art': re-characterising the machine as 'an artisan's tool that simply needed to be mastered by the modern craftsman'.[71] Yet the ideological origins of these interwar developments can be found in the 1900s and 1910s in the writings of Wells, Ashbee and Geddes, which attempted to reconcile romanticism with the utilitarian imperatives of industrial mass production in modern urban society. Wells especially, in *A Modern Utopia*'s explicit critique of Morris' ideal of hand production, envisaged a re-enchantment of machinery. For Wells, mastery of technology, coupled with a functionalist understanding of the social value of beauty, would add craft and pleasure to work in an industrial age.

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[69] Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.79.
[70] Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.63 and 78-9.
[71] Saler, p.79.

The following section of this chapter turns towards a consideration of aestheticised representations of machines in late Victorian and Edwardian art and literature. In particular, it analyses literary depictions of the motor car as indicative of polarised aesthetic responses towards technological innovation. Technology inspired such contradictory attitudes and representations in large part because of its potential to generate new ways of seeing, at the same time as it destroyed or occluded pre-modern modes of perception. Diversity of opinion thus hinged not only upon conflicting attitudes surrounding the effects of machine technologies upon aestheticised perception, but on the desirability of these effects in modern life.

In Forster's *Howards End,* the technological intrusion of the motor car into the English countryside represents the 'annihilation of space' – or, more accurately, its apparent annihilation is indicative of humanity's failure to connect: 'the car came round with the hood up, and she lost all sense of space'; 'she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal. They had no part with the earth and its emotions.'[72] Forster balked at the motor car's intrusion into the countryside, in which its 'dust, and stink, and cosmopolitan chatter' disrupted the quiet rhythms of natural life, and viewed it as representative of a modern, urbane kind of excitable boredom that failed to treat beauty seriously:

> The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, […] connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable.

Yet, increasingly, writers who self-consciously identified as 'modern' sought to aestheticise modern technologies, and endow machines with a sense of romantic excitement that embodied the 'modern spirit'. Ford Madox Ford, for example, described cranes at work over the London skyline, observed from the window of an electric tram: 'the modern spirit expressing itself in terms not of men but of forces, we gliding by, the timbers swinging up, without any visibly human action in either motion […] to all appearances infallible.'[73] There

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[72] E. M. Forster, *Howards End,* (1910; London: Penguin, 1953), pp.186 and 200.
[73] Ford Madox Hueffer [= Ford], *The Soul of London – A Survey of a Modern City* (1905; Read Books Ltd, 2011), pp.40-1.

is a sense of fascination at the strangeness of mechanical power: an aesthetic interest in the smooth, almost weightless operation of vast machines – seemingly without human direction.

To be sure, there were many late Victorian and Edwardian writers considered to be 'modern' in their aesthetic allegiances who lamented the ubiquity of technology in the modern city. Though Arthur Symons relished the aesthetic possibilities of urban life, and indeed celebrated the artificial beauty of the city, he lamented the intrusion of industrial machinery into the human rhythms of the metropolis. 'London was once habitable,' he wrote, but 'the machines have killed it,' driving out 'everything old and human [with] wheels and hammers and the fluids of noise and speed.'[74] However, Nicholas Freeman writes that literary impressionism, in particular, 'proved more willing to address the sensation of speed.' Freeman concedes that impressionist writers' accounts of train and car travel 'now seem somewhat quaint, overtaken by faster transport and by more aggressively "modern" art, such as Futurism and Vorticism.'[75] Yet the fact that such accounts cannot be considered as 'good art' by modern standards of assessment should not blind us to their radical re-negotiations of the relationship between nature, art and machines. W. E. Henley's final poem, 'A Song of Speed' for example, described an exhilarating ride in a Mercedes, and savoured the aesthetic possibilities of new technology. The experience of the car journey is suggestive of infinity:

> Taste of inhuman
> Unviolable Vasts […]
> Naked, unvisited
> Emperies of Space!
> And the heart in your breast
> Sings, as the World
> Slips past like a dream
> Of Speed—[76]

For Henley, machines did not annihilate space or dull the finer elements of human nature – quite the opposite. His car journey through the countryside is conveyed in terms in which fleeting impressions of the world create a sense of almost divine rapture at the illimitable beauty of nature, as the hedgerows and fields of the English landscape rush by one after

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[74] Arthur Symons, *London: A Book of Aspects,* in *Cities and Sea-Coasts and Islands* (New York: Brentano's, 1918), p.171.

[75] Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.145.

[76] W. E. Henley, *A Song of Speed* (London: David Nutt, 1903), p.11.

another. His poem might be considered as a techno-pastoral in which modern technology enables a new and *heightened* appreciation of natural beauty. The sum of these flickering sense impressions is greater than its parts; Henley's suggestion seems to be that the motor car elevates human perspective into a sublime panorama of English pastoral landscape and history:

> The desperate, great anarchies,
> The matchless serenitudes,
> The magical, ravishing,
> Changing, transforming
> Trances of Daylight.
> Speed, and the lap
> Of the Land that you know
> For the first time (it seems),
> As you push through the maze
> Of her beauties and privacies,
> Terrors, astonishments:
> Heath, common, pinewood,
> Downland and river-scape,
> Cherry-orchards, water-meads,
> Forests and stubbles,
> Oak-temples, daisy-spreads,
> Vistas of harebell, […]
> Ancestral ossuaries,
> Whence (you may fancy)
> The troubled grey ghosts
> Of your forefathers peer,
> As you swoop down on them,
> With a wild, wondering
> Pride in their seed[.][77]

Indeed, Wolfgang Schivelbusch argued that the technological innovations of the industrial revolution created new ways of seeing that were central to the development of literary and artistic impressionism. The experience of travelling at speed, first enabled earlier in the nineteenth century by the railway, created a sense of evanescence. Indeed, early chroniclers of the railway journey remarked on the need to consciously develop a technique of observing the landscape from train windows: the continuous alternation of 'panoramic perception' with a momentary focus on particular instances or impressions, before they were whisked out of vision.[78] Moreover, Schivelbusch suggests, this perception of evanescence during the railway

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[77] Henley, pp.12-3.
[78] Schivelbusch, p.64.

journey was paralleled by new modes of perceiving interior spaces with the development of new forms of industrial architecture. Habituated to dark and candle-lit interiors, cultural commentators wrote of new glass and steel-framed architecture such as Crystal Palace that it gave a disorienting sense of 'incorporeal space'. Schivelbusch writes in somewhat eccentric, though persuasive, terms that technological innovation was instrumental in developing new modes of aestheticised perception in the late Victorian period: 'It does seem justifiable to view Impressionism as a codification of a certain nineteenth-century perception of an evanescence whose powerful material manifestations are the railroad and ferro-vitreous architecture.'[79]

Henley relished this new 'way of seeing' made possible by industrial technologies. His aestheticised mode of perceiving and representing industrial speed was one that reconciled the new with the old, and envisaged technological innovation as improving upon the beauty of nature – thus, in a sense spiritualising technologies. Yet, of course, the desirability of technologised perception depended upon whether one *wanted* a new way of seeing that accommodated and made use of the technologies of modern life. For Forster, the whole problem of modern urban life was its 'hurry'; and escape to the countryside represented a return to pre-modern ways of experiencing nature. Whilst Henley celebrated the panoramic effect of evanescent visual impressions, for Forster a car journey through the countryside was precisely the kind of hurried and disembodied urban perception that left little time to 'connect'.

Mechanical Agency: monstrous engines and insidious appliances

During the late Victorian and Edwardian period, poets and novelists generated not just a diverse range of aestheticised representations of machine technology, but also a range of ways in which machines could be imaginatively configured. Tamara Ketabgian has recently criticised the historiographical reading of Victorian literary and intellectual culture as one solely of 'organic sympathies', 'stalwart humanism', the 'tragic vision of industrial alienation' and a 'corresponding antipathy towards the machine'. Ketabgian has attempted to

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[79] Schivelbusch, pp.45-8.

rehistoricise Victorian culture in ways that do not simply pit humans against machines. Instead, she argues:

> Victorian machines were not simply soulless, lifeless, predictable, and undimensional; not simply opposed to organic feeling and vitality, and not simply reductive material objects. […] Unlike the static Hobbesian watches of the Enlightenment, they were *power* motors, whose regulation of fire, coal, and steam supported a capacious vision of engines as living instinctive organisms[.] […] Despite its continuing dominance in many critical accounts, this image of deadening machines and tragically alienated workers represents only one register within a complex symbolic field.[80]

Ketabgian's study covered the 1830s to the 1870s; whilst much of her argument holds true for late Victorian and Edwardian literature, it is the contention of this chapter that, though machines continued to lead a 'rich figurative life' throughout the period, the sense that machines exerted a 'deadening' influence upon human character and emotional life was reasserted in response to the rise of 'neotechnic' technologies such as the wireless telegraph.

In late nineteenth and twentieth century literature there are two broad imaginative configurations of the machine – each with their own attendant anxieties – which we might map on to Patrick Geddes' division of industrial technologies (as well as mind-sets) into paleotechnic and neotechnic phases. Paleotechnic machines were, in Ketabgian's term '*power* motors' of locomotion and production: coal-burning, hot, noisy, dirty, clanging, throbbing, belching forth polluting smoke; Charles Masterman's 'vast levers and furnaces', which might crush the frail, unprotected human body 'like an eggshell'.[81] The master image of paleotechnic machines was the steam engine; visible, for example, in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* in which the threshing machine symbolises the incompatibility of rural and industrial imaginaries:

> here was the engine which was to act as the *primum mobile* of this little world. By the engine stood a dark motionless being, a sooty and grimy embodiment of tallness, in a sort of trance, with a heap of coals by his side: it was the engineman. The isolation of his manner and colour lent him the appearance of a creature from Tophet, who had strayed into the pellucid smokelessness of this region of yellow grain and pale soil, with which he had nothing in common, to amaze and to discompose its aborigines. […] If any of the autochthonous idlers asked him what he called himself, he replied shortly, 'an engineer'.[82]

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[80] Ketabgian, pp.1-2
[81] Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.284.
[82] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891; Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p.285.

What is striking about this passage are the ways in which industrial technology is imaginatively configured in terms of the *old.* The disparity between rural and industrial mentalities is configured, consciously and deliberately, in ahistorical, anthropological, even mythic terms. Within this schema the machine is, essentially, animistic: sheaves are 'gulped down by the insatiable swallower […] And the immense stack of straw where in the morning there had been nothing, appeared as the *faeces* of the same buzzing red glutton.'[83] The operation of the machine is conceptualised in calculatedly biological terms of feeding and excretion, conveying a sense of machines as monstrous, diabolical creations exerting a 'despotic demand' upon human labour.[84]

Indeed, Victorian imaginative representations of the industrial revolution were pervaded by this sense of the infernal.[85] The imaginative configuration of paleotechnic machines was thus shot through with essentially Christian anxieties surrounding sexuality, temptation, and the Fall. Peter Gay wrote that rail travel held 'troubling erotic implications' in the nineteenth-century consciousness: the passenger's experience of being unable to control the train's momentum could induce feelings of helpless passivity, whilst the vibrations of the train were 'productive of tensions both anticipated and feared.'[86] For Gay, the railway journey awakened deep sexual anxieties: 'the erotic desires and fears stimulated by the rhythmic experience of the train ride […] and the nervous feeling that speed was accelerating beyond reason.'[87] Elaine Showalter, too, has read erotic anxieties into fin-de-siècle literary representations of machinery. She notes of Wells' *The Time Machine* that the subterranean technological world of the Morlocks seems evocative of the male body itself. The time-traveller remarks of the 'throb and hum' of machinery, and the 'heavy smell of blood' in the stiflingly hot underground atmosphere. For Showalter, whilst the Eloi are hyperfeminised, the Morlocks are 'hypermasculinised, technological, rapacious, and cannibalistic, embodying

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[83] Hardy, p.292.
[84] Hardy, p.285.
[85] Michael Freeman has written of the identification of the railway with Biblical imagery, most notably with Satan. Freeman also writes of the wider Victorian identification of industry with Satan – visible, for instance, in the painter John Martin's depiction of scenes from Paradise Lost. See Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination,* especially pp.14-17 and 43-51.
Leo Marx has also written of the allusions to Biblical imagery in representations of machines and industry in Victorian literature. See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.21-4.
[86] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud,* vol.2, *The Tender Passion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.320-328.
[87] Peter Gay, *The Bouregois Experience,* vol. 1, *Education of the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.63.

[…] male violence and lust.' The narrator's journey to the industrial underworld thus 'emphasises the wells that lead into the unconscious, into the subterranean corridors of the creative, violent and sexual self […] a guiltily rapacious male sexuality.'[88]

In contrast, neotechnic machines were imaginatively configured in terms of animism of a different kind: not precisely inhuman so much as post-human. As opposed to the hot, noisy, throbbing engines of the paleotechnic imagination, the neotechnic imagination fed off technological innovations such as electricity, the telegraph, telephone, radio and phonograph. These machines could be envisaged as coldly rational; as anaesthetic, disembodying and isolating; as insidious and insinuating in their clean, smooth, frictionless running and invisible operation. Bernhard Rieger views this uncertainty surrounding the operation of machines to be key to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxieties about technology. Contemporaries 'not only lacked a understanding of the scientific findings on which many innovations were based; they also failed to comprehend how the new mechanisms that were coming into existence functioned.'[89] In this reading, the increasing technological complexity of the late Victorian and Edwardian period is seen to be psychologically disempowering; suggestive, at an imaginative level, of blind dependence upon machines that were insinuating themselves into the fabric of society.

In E. M. Forster's dystopian short story, 'The Machine Stops', the most striking feature of machine technology is that it is simultaneously all pervasive and invisible. The inhabitants of the Machine do not seem to supervise, maintain or repair it – indeed, no one seems to know how it works; the machine runs itself. In this sense, the Machine is not just the setting of Forster's story: it is also its protagonist. Every human activity has come to be mediated by the machine, and has ultimately come to be assimilated by it. The frictionless and invisible operation of communication technologies is seen first to have insinuated itself into human relations, interpolating between direct human relationships, and then to have assimilated these relationships into its own functioning. It has isolated humans from one another in order to extend its mode of operation. Whilst paleotechnic anxieties were inflected with the erotic associations of machinery, neotechnic anxieties were of an asexual and sexually anaesthetic kind: not so much likely to contaminate human relations as to supersede them.

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[88] Elaine Showalter, 'The Apocalyptic Fables of H. G. Wells', in John Stokes (ed) *Fin de siècle/ fin du globe: fears and fantasies of the late nineteenth century,* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.76.
[89] Rieger, pp.2-3.

Communicating with one another only at a distance, with the machine in between, the inhabitants of 'The Machine Stops' have ceased to desire one another sexually. They are disgusted at the prospect of human touch, and are faintly repulsed by their residual bodily impulses. For Forster, this was not just dystopian prophecy, but an image of what he believed social relations were fast becoming in a technological age.[90] Such anxieties surrounding the effects of disembodied modes of communication upon human relationships were pervasive in early twentieth-century culture – so much so that they were satirised in a 1906 edition of *Punch,* in which, despite its punning, the wireless telegraph is depicted as an overwhelmingly isolating technology [Figure 1].[91]

DECEMBER 26, 1906.]   PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.   451

FORECASTS FOR 1907.

IV.—DEVELOPMENT OF WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY. SCENE IN HYDE PARK.
[These two figures are not communicating with one another. The lady is receiving an amatory message, and the gentleman some racing results.]
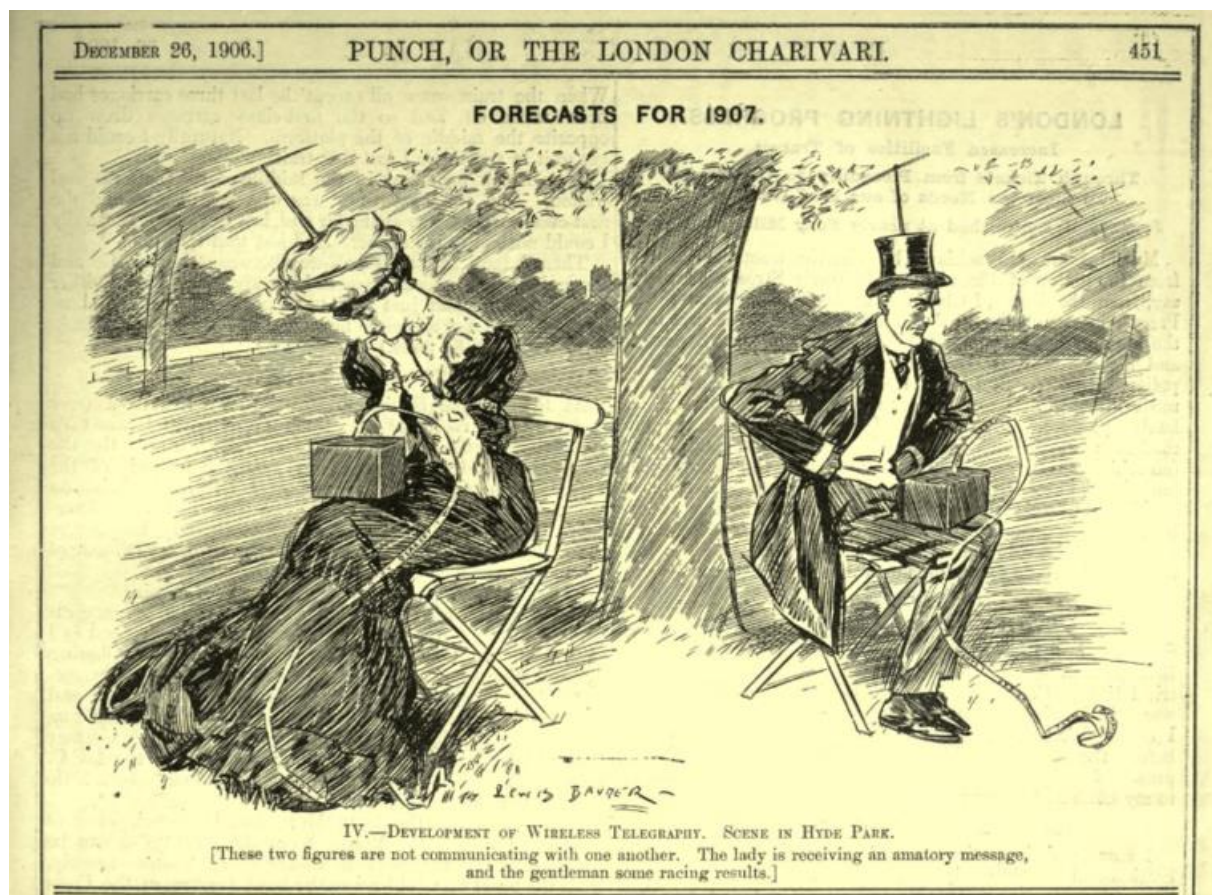
Figure 1: Forecasts for 1907.
[Caption reads: 'Development of Wireless Telegraphy, Scene in Hyde Park. These two figures are not communicating with one another. The lady is receiving an amatory message, and the gentleman some racing results.']

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[90] Alvin C. Kibel, 'Literary Responses to Technology: E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops'', *Icon,* 4 (1998), p.131.
[91] 'Forecast for 1907', *Punch, or the London Charivari,* Dec 26th 1906, p.451. See also analysis of the cartoon as part of a wider discussion of anxieties surrounding the effects of technology upon relationships in Melissa Dickson, 'The Victorians had the same concerns about technology as we do', *The Conversation,* June 21st 2016 [https://theconversation.com/the-victorians-had-the-same-concerns-about-technology-as-we-do-60476].

Neotechnic machines were not unequivocally portrayed in such anaesthetic terms in early twentieth-century literature and art. Movements such as Futurism and Vorticism emphasised a sense of speed, youth and violence in a society mediated by machines, and celebrated the destructive possibilities of modern technology. Yet Marshall Berman has written of the futurist call for a 'nonhuman type' of human, in which human energies would be merged with modern technology, that 'it appears that some very important kinds of human feeling are dying, even as machines are coming to life.' The futurist tradition celebrated machines precisely because they *would* destroy the feeble human qualities of 'goodness of heart, affection, and love, those corrosive poisons of vital energy.'[92] Moreover, Berman notes that this 'uncritical romance of machines, fused with their utter remoteness from people', entailed imaginative consequences that were themselves disembodying and isolating. He writes that the futurist vision of the machine logic as an exemplary model for human life in modernity generated a new kind of anxiety: 'Its problem, and the problem of all modernisms in the futurist tradition is that, with brilliant machines and mechanical systems playing all the leading roles […] there is precious little for modern man to do except plug in.'[93] There is thus a pervasive anxiety in modernist literature, and depictions of frictionless technologies of locomotion and communication in the neotechnic present and future, that centred on the very efficiency of modern technology. There is an imaginative sense that machines were annexing and assimilating ever more aspects of human life and work, as well as the substance of human relationships themselves, and an anxiety that mechanical efficiency might render the 'finer' elements of human endeavour obsolete. If, as Oscar Wilde suggested, 'all art is quite useless', would a society governed by the utilitarian rationality of machines find a place for beauty?[94] And there is a sense of uncertainty surrounding the effects of mechanical efficiency upon human nature: an uncertainty as to the fate of human individuality and spirituality in a society increasingly regulated by machine technologies.

This ambivalence towards 'neotechnic' innovation hinged upon the nature of its departure from the 'paleotechnic' order held to be characteristic of early industrialisation. Technological innovation presented two broad possibilities, in which social reality and the imaginative coalesced. For those with ruralist sympathies, technological innovation might 'clean up' the polluted urban and industrial environment, as well as facilitating movement

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[92] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), p.25.
[93] Berman, pp.26-7.
[94] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1891), p.vii.

between countryside and city that would restore a sense of connection to nature. For many artistic and literary modernists, it might even *heighten* the experience of natural beauty by providing new ways of seeing. Yet technological innovation could also represent a form of social organisation still further removed from an 'organic society' than that of the Industrial Revolution. The very complexity and efficiency of 'neotechnic' technologies was suggestive that, in the society of the immediate future, humanity might come to be shaped less and less by the dictates of the natural environment, and ever more by technological progress. The basic paradox at the heart of contemporary ambivalence was that technological *re*gress was an impossibility: social progress depended on the dual task of creating better technologies and better ways of using them. Whilst many social commentators expressed faith in the possibilities of re-harnessing technological innovation towards ideal ends, this double burden was itself productive of anxieties: technological progress required constant vigilance.

Attitudes towards Factory Life

The following section turns away from high-cultural representations of industrial technology towards a focus on working-class experiences. It explores the 'view from below', by examining working-class autobiographical writing, as well as oral history transcripts of interviews with industrial workers reflecting upon factory employment during the opening years of the twentieth century. It considers how workers themselves related to conditions of life and work that were mediated by machines, and how they conceived of their own experience in relation to intellectual and literary discourses of industrial labour. Yet these two genres of source themselves provide contradictory perspectives upon attitudes towards industrial employment. Whilst autobiographers frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the realities of industrial employment, and could experience intense anxiety over the conditions of factory life, oral history interviews complicate this picture. Interviewees generally express contentment with factory employment and, on occasion, genuine enjoyment of factory life.

Working-class autobiographers frequently wrote of their hatred of factory life. Many writers who had reached financial, political or literary success later in life reflected upon their experience of industrial labour with horror. In her untitled and unpublished autobiography, Doris Hunt wrote of her employment as a child in a Lancashire cotton mill in 1912: 'I'd

shudder to think of children having such a life […] I hated the mill-work.'[95] Indeed, autobiographers frequently wrote of their sense of injustice at being sent to work in factories at a young age. The unpublished account of John Bull details the author's experience of his first job cleaning tools on the factory floor, in terms that are common to many autobiographies: 'I hated the job, that after a day or so made my fingertips bleed, the smells, the man in charge who said that I was slow and not doing the job properly.'[96] V. W. Garratt, who left home as an adolescent to escape an abusive childhood, and determined to find a better life, described his disaffection upon encountering the realities of employment in a sheet metal factory: 'the truth was that, as I had started adolescence in a blaze of idealism, the conflicting ugliness of factory life often drove my spirits into the depths.'[97] He resolved to escape factory life in 1913, writing of his co-workers: 'none of them knew how heartily I detested the grease and smells and the roaring machinery. It made me mentally sick'.[98]

Garratt found relief from factory work both in weekend escapes to countryside hikes, and in the imaginative escape of literature, writing that he 'rushed to poetry', which 'raised me to spiritual exaltations which swamped the trivialities of life'; 'I soon came to regard the factory as the inferno from which the Dante in me would have to escape.'[99] In his hatred of machinery, his yearning for the pleasures of the countryside, and his location of spirituality in nature and art, Garratt wrote of his own experience in terms that chimed with the romantic critique of industrialism. Indeed, he consciously identified with romantic tropes of the industrial revolution: the factory as Dante's *Inferno*; the mechanical nature of industrial labour contrasted to the humanising effects of literature; and an emphasis on art as embodying an ideal of human perfection, which might defend against the utilitarian imperatives of industrial society.

Yet this highlights something of a selection bias in marshalling evidence from working-class autobiographies in an examination of working-class experiences. Many autobiographers

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[95] Doris Hunt, *Untitled,* 2:428, pp.9-12, Burnett Archive of Working-Class Autobiographies.
[96] John Bull, *Early childhood*, 2:114, p.23, Burnett Archive.
[97] V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939), p.92
[98] Garratt, p.131.
[99] Garratt continued: 'I rushed to poetry for escape and lived a double existence by seeking the slopes of Parnassus in thought while my hands mechanically soldered lead fittings or malletted sheet metal into shape at the grimy benches of the workshop. […] From poetry, I derived an ecstasy that flowed from the sense of the beauty and the majesty of creation. It was all-absorbing, unequivocal and complete.' For further discussion, see Chapter 6, 'The Cleansing of England'.
Garratt, pp. 116 and 92-3.

who reflected upon life in an earlier age had themselves joined the intelligentsia later in life – indeed, after the intervening years of the First World War, Garratt gained a place on a journalism course at London University, later publishing articles for *English Review* as well as his own poetry.[100] It is highly possible that – at a high level of aggregation – those who wrote down (and sometimes published) the stories of their lives were more likely to have been dissatisfied with factory life than those who did not, by simple virtue of the fact that many autobiographers sought to 'better themselves' by intellectual training, and subsequently escaped the necessity of industrial employment.

   In transcripts of oral history interviews of mill workers, undertaken in the 1970s by Elizabeth Roberts as part of a study of social life in Lancaster and Barrow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one finds a much more equivocal picture.[101] For every interviewee who disliked or resented industrial employment there can be found another who uncomplainingly accepted the necessity of factory work, or who expressed pride in their work and genuine enjoyment of factory life. Like many working-class autobiographers, several interviewees expressed resentment at being sent to work at a young age and enduring harsh discipline from factory supervisors. One woman, 'Miss A', recalled leaving school in 1901 to become a weaver:

> Q: Did you like the mill?
> A: I hated it. It was a job.
> Q: What did you hate especially?
> A: I don't know. I used to like going to school […] I wish I could have stopped at school but no, that was that. […] I got many a knock from the Missus as I passed a flaw. They weren't happy days in the mill, not to me. I had to go and I went.[102]

Another interviewee, 'Mrs B', spoke of the 'terrible' noise of power looms at work: 'I went in't the weaving shed and I didn't like it. […] I wasn't one for a lot of noise and I didn't like it.'[103] Yet, unlike Miss A, Mrs B found factory work a preferable alternative to remaining at school full-time after the age of 12, and expressed pleasure in becoming a wage earner; 'you

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[100] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2001), pp.42-3; Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working-Class Readers, 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.191.
[101] Elizabeth Roberts, 'Social Life in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1925', Elizabeth Roberts' Working Class Oral History Archive, Regional History Centre, Lancaster University. See Also Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), chapter 2.
[102] Interview with Miss A.3.P, page 3 of transcript.
[103] Mrs B.5.P, p.5.

see, I was grown up then.'[104] Indeed, other interviewees spoke in similar terms of their pride in finding employment at a young age, and entering the 'adult' world of work. One woman recalled starting work full-time at the age of 10, against the wishes of her father, (who wanted her to remain at school in the hope of finding employment outside of the mill) insisting that 'it was good enough for m'mother and it's good enough for me'. 'and I've never rued, I've been happy and that is all you want when you're working. […] We used to have some happy times [in the mill]. Oh, at Christmas we had some happy times.'[105]

The interviewer seemed sceptical of such straightforward enjoyment of mill work, and returned to the theme throughout the interview:

> Q: It wasn't very much [pay] was it?
> A: We were happy.[106]
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> Q: You really were quite happy working?
> A: Oh yes, nothing to bother about at all. At Christmastime we used to have a good party.[107]

Whilst many interviewees, unsurprisingly, comment on the shock of the noise of spinning and weaving machinery, several recall that lip reading enabled a sense of community within the mill. Women especially remark upon their enjoyment of millwork in terms of workplace gossip and female camaraderie: 'I loved working in the mill and I loved weaving,' answered one interviewee. 'After a weekend we always had a lot to talk about. […] What we had done and who we had met. And we had been to the Pictures! We were talking from morning till night.'[108] Indeed, so strong was the sense of community that one male interviewee who spoke of his dislike of the mill suggested that his dissatisfaction originated not so much from the noise of industrial machinery itself, but in his isolation from the workplace community: 'you couldn't hear yourself speak. They all lip-talked'; 'they could all talk to one another, they could all lip-read but I couldn't understand them'.[109]

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[104] Mrs B.5.P, p.53.
[105] Miss H.4.L, p.1.
[106] Miss H.4.L, p.2.
[107] Miss H.4.L, p.37.
[108] Mrs B.4.P, pp.29-30
[109] Mr E.1.P, pp.9 and 34.

In general, the oral history interviewees are both more equivocal than working-class autobiographers about their experiences of factory life, and less reflective. For those who did not express outright enjoyment, or who disliked factory life, common responses are 'no reason, I just didn't take to it at all'; 'I got used to it'; or, 'it was a job'.[110] Many display a kind of pragmatic acceptance of factory work – an ambivalence that reconciled dissatisfaction with particular aspects of their work with a matter-of-fact acknowledgement of the necessity of employment. 'Mr C' joined the Independent Labour Party in protest at his working conditions: 'the early start and the conditions and also the attitude of the tacklers, the bullying of most tacklers, not all, whose wages depended on the wages of the weavers. I just didn't like it'.[111] Yet he also reflected with equanimity upon the necessity of factory employment – perhaps with the implicit sense that a protest at the level of the individual was incompatible with class solidarity:

> Q: What did you think of the working conditions in the mill at the turn of the century?
> A: As far as I'm concerned and I think it was the general outlook, you didn't think much about them. You just took them as they were. It was the accepted mode of life and so forth. There wasn't this discontent that there is now. But, however, you just took it as it would come along. There was some effort to improve one's position, naturally.[112]

> Q: Why did you choose the mill?
> A: I didn't choose it. It was simply that I was old enough to go to work, the mill was the usual thing for children to go to. I followed the usual trend.[113]

Whilst many working-class autobiographers narrated their life stories in terms of wider historical processes, and conceptualised their own experience in relation to romantic intellectual and literary tropes of industrialisation, it is rare for oral history interviewees to conceive of their lives in this way. Yet, for those who did intellectualise their personal experience, it is interesting to note the difference in emphasis. One interviewee, Mr B, spoke of his dislike of millwork in terms of the alienation of labour and the ethical failures of industrial capitalism:

> It didn't appeal to my nature. If you were given a job and you weren't happy on it, you could see no real finishing touch or anything like that on it, you would get

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[110] For example, Mrs P.1.L, p.68; Mrs B.4.P, p.29; Miss A.3.P, p.3.
[111] Mr C.1.P, p.42.
[112] Mr C.1.P, p.15.
[113] Mr C.1.P, p.31.

discontent. In those days it was just coming to the temperature more or less of the industrial revolution and a lot of things were rough and ready.[114]

It is what Disraeli said, there are two nations in this country, they were very poor and the poor were the poor. Believe me when I was working, about 15 or 16 and noticing things, coming out of the mill at night at half past five, there were little lads about 10 or 12 at the gates, "Have you any bread left?" I used to think, the richest country in the world and yet little school lads coming and asking for bread. […] When I started work, we had read about the slaves in Wilberforce's time, how he had freed the slaves and I used to think […] I used to think, wait a minute, there's what you call economic slavery, […] even though you disliked your job you had to work.[115]

Whatever their views upon the role of technological innovation in ameliorating the social and ethical failures of the industrial revolution, late Victorian and Edwardian novelists and social commentators agreed near-unanimously that industrial workers inevitably experienced conditions of industrial life and work as difficult, unenjoyable, brutalising and degrading. In no small part, these were social sympathies that originated in response to the very real horrors of factory work; yet they also rested upon implicit assumptions about the psychological effects of machine labour, the loss of organic community, and the lack of access to nature in industrial society. Whilst many working-class autobiographers who themselves found factory work unpleasant and degrading strongly identified with this critique, we find rather different (and more varied) conceptualisations of industrial employment among oral history interviewees. Mr B, for example, did locate his own experience in a wider historical critique of the industrial revolution, yet this was not the romantic critique of the materialist and utilitarian values of industrialism. Rather, he related his own life narrative to wider processes of social inequality, and located his dissatisfaction with the structure of industrial society in its fundamental unfairness. His dislike of factory work was not identified with the dehumanising nature of machines themselves, but with the lack of job satisfaction on a production line – the inability to see a 'finishing touch' in the product of his labour. Indeed, Mr B's experiences chime with the interwar critiques of industrial mass production explored by Michael Saler, in which progressivists within the Arts and Crafts movement sought not to abandon machine production, but to re-enchant industrial work by re-characterising the machine as an artisan's tool for the modern craftsman.[116]

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[114] Mr B.8.P, p.2.
[115] Mr B.8.P, p.7.
[116] Saler, pp.63 and 78-9.

The roots of this amelioration of machine technologies lay in a fundamental change of emphasis amongst those who identified with elements of the romantic critique of the industrial revolution; one which shifted the focus from an ideal of humanity to engagement with the lived experiences of industrial workers. This was, however, a rare perspective in late Victorian and Edwardian culture. There was a desire, amongst many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectuals, to safeguard and champion an ideal of humanity that was felt to be under threat in an era of urbanisation and industrialisation; yet this desire, at times, shaded into misanthropy when confronted with the actual reality of working people. Such misanthropy tended to produce the dual assertion that industrial workers were invariably degraded by soulless machine work, and that the solution was to 'humanise' workers through a return to the putative pleasures of manual labour. This is what Wells meant when he indicted the romantic critique of industrialisation as 'the Olympian unworldliness of an irresponsible rich man of the shareholding type, a Ruskin or a Morris playing at life'; a view that was echoed in Geddes' formulation of romantic social critics as 'too largely romantics – wrong in their reluctance, sometimes even passionate refusal, to admit the claims and needs of the present to live and labour in its turn, and according to its lights'.[117] Implicit in Wells' and Geddes' criticism of the Ruskinian philosophy of work, and, in turn, the romantic critique of industrialism of which it was a part, is the distinction between an ideal of humanity, and sympathy for the lived experience of *people*. Their contention was that, despite the fineness of their ideals, romantic social critics who hoped to re-enchant manual labour often missed the mark – due in large part to their emotional distance from the everyday realities of actual workers.

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[117] Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, p.72; Geddes, pp.92-3.

Chapter Five – 'Merged in the Aggregate': Uniformity, Individuality and Loneliness in Mass Society

The following chapter explores anxieties over the loss of individuality in mass society, and the contemporary fear that modern urban life would produce a population of drab, colourless uniformity in which individuals passively accepted their situation. Such attitudes have often been read as indicative both of the intellectual snobbery of social elites, and of the anti-modern and anti-urban tendencies of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British culture. The chapter re-focuses attention upon the ambivalence of novelists and social commentators, in which elite misanthropy, and anxieties about the urban 'masses', coincided with a new and modernistic awareness of the essential humanity and rich emotional lives of each individual in the urban 'crowd'. Yet this awareness was itself productive of anxieties, in which social observers worried over the tension between the need to eradicate poverty, and the consequences of material comfort; between anxieties about the threatening crowd, and concerns for social isolation; and between the moral imperative to 'humanise' working-class urbanites, and instinctive aesthetic aversion to the urban 'masses'.

Social commentators such as Charles Masterman vacillated between fears that city life was productive of restlessness and social disorder, and anxiety that the ugliness of the city and the monotony of industrial work would produce a 'whitewashed variety of man, with life reduced to its simplest dimensions'.[1] Ugly cities were seen to produce dull people, leading narrow, rootless and spiritually impoverished lives. A recurring theme is that the mechanical nature of modern life in the industrial city produced a working class that were themselves somewhat mechanical and soulless, divorced from nature and thus not really alive. The socialist sympathies of commentators such as William Morris were motivated in large part by a belief that the urban environment militated against men's finer feelings, and their sense of aesthetic beauty. Yet there is also a pervasive tone of misanthropy in the writings of novelists and social commentators, which frequently configured the urban 'crowd' or 'mass' in abstracted and dehumanising metaphors. Whilst the crowded conditions of slum life were represented in terms of brutalising suffering and bestial ugliness, the materially comfortable lives of suburbanites were conveyed in a register of mechanical uniformity and fatuous acquiescence. Authors such as John Carey and J. S. McClelland have illuminated the misanthropic and anti-

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[1] Charles Masterman, *From the Abyss,* (1902; London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1980), p.35.

democratic nature of intellectual conceptualisations of the 'crowd' and the 'mass', yet the ambivalence and emotional complexity of elite views of the working classes remains underexplored.[2] It is argued that such views indicate the difficulty of psychologically accepting the flux, chaos and disorder inherent in modern urban life, and the emotional challenge of recovering a sense of individuality and human diversity amidst the density of settlement and the vast scale of the modern city.

This is not to deny that late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual culture was pervaded by disdain for mass society, or a misanthropic contempt towards the urban poor and suburban middle classes alike. Rather, it is to suggest that misanthropy performed emotional functions, serving as an emotional strategy with which to reconcile an intense ambivalence towards the human condition in the modern city. Anxiety engendered by the vastness of the city and the heterogeneity of its population, the anxiety-inducing multiplicity of human life, merged into a pessimistic acceptance of the monotony of the urban landscape and the dull uniformity of its inhabitants. Many social commentators alternated between purposive calls for social reform, and despair at the enormity of the task of social change. It is argued that such misanthropy was, in part, a reaction to the apparently insoluble scale of social problems: novelists such as George Gissing, for example, display enormous sensitivity to individual miseries, but often shade into pessimism and disdain when discussing the urban poor as a whole.

The chapter also examines working-class subjectivity and attitudes towards the urban crowd in working-class autobiographical writing. Unsurprisingly, observers from 'within' the mass were often much less likely to sense the crowd as a threatening presence than were observers from a higher social class, who surveyed the urban masses from a distance. Yet rural-urban migrants in particular frequently expressed fear of the urban crowd, and anxiety over the vast scale of human life in the modern city. Moreover, a sense of loneliness, psychological isolation and alienation from the urban crowd is not uncommon in working-class autobiographical writing. Several autobiographers configure the urban 'mass' in terms that closely match those of the literary intelligentsia. Whilst this distinction between 'working-class autobiographers' and 'the intelligentsia' can be misleading (many autobiographers joined the intelligentsia or reached financial success later in life, whilst many

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[2] For example, John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); J. S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: Plato to Canetti* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989).

of the 'intellectuals' discussed in the chapter, such as Gissing and H. G. Wells, came from socio-economically 'ordinary' backgrounds or had first-hand experience of urban poverty), autobiographies provide a subjective perspective which can illuminate the emotional impulses and processes that lay behind social attitudes and ideological positions.

Uniformity in Mass Society

Perhaps the single most common theme in late Victorian and Edwardian writings on cities is the uniformity of the urban landscape. Novelists and social commentators alike expressed an intense anxiety about the mechanical regularity of the modern city and, in particular, the sameness of suburbia. The conceit of Arthur Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets* – that the apparent plurality of the urban environment is an illusion – is typical:

> This street [...] is hundreds of miles long. That it is planned in short lengths is true, but there is no other way in the world that can more properly be called a single street, because of its dismal lack of accent, its solid uniformity, its utter remoteness from delight.[3]

Similarly, Masterman wrote that the nature of urban life was to be found in its repetition: 'the city is, for the most part, an endless series of replicas.'[4] The repetitive nature of the urban landscape is matched and evoked through sheer repetition of the theme: 'similar streets, similar people, similar occupations'; 'the miles and miles of little red houses in little silent streets'; 'labyrinths of drab streets'; 'miles of mean streets stretch before [the observer], smoky, dirty, unbeautiful, the general desolation only modified by buildings of varying ferocity of ugliness'; 'the utter ugliness of it all [...] existence here is set in grey – grey streets, grey people, a drab monotony [...]', and so on.[5]

This concern for the monotony of urban life is illustrative of a central problem and preoccupation in late Victorian and Edwardian high culture.[6] On the one hand, the jerry-built

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[3] Arthur Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1895), p.26.
[4] Charles Masterman, 'The Burden of London', in *In Peril of Change: Essays Written in Time of Tranquillity* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1905), p.161.
[5] Masterman, 'The Burden of London', p.161; 'The Suburbans', in *In Peril of Change,* p.70; 'Realities at Home' in Charles Masterman (ed) *The Heart of the Empire The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp.27-8, 11 and 16.
[6] The collection of essays, edited by Masterman in *The Heart of the Empire,* for example, provide a kind of litany of monotony. In the preface to the volume, Masterman outlined the problems of modern urban life upon

uniformity of the urban landscape was a very real and all-too apparent problem of urban planning; moreover, out of the many social problems of the modern city that presented themselves to social observers, it was one that might easily be remedied. At a superficial level, variety might be restored to the urban landscape through urban planning and improvements to housing, whilst the lives of urbanites might be re-stimulated through better education, the influence of religion, or access to the pleasures of nature. Yet, on the other hand, it is indicative of a basic ambivalence in many social commentators' and novelists' conceptualisation of the individual in mass society: the tension between the separate reality of each individual life, and the apparent uniformity of individuals aggregated in mass urban society. The appearance of the urban landscape was mapped on to the social and emotional condition of its inhabitants – a reductive tendency that equated human worth to habitat. There was a constant tension between social sympathy and instinctive aesthetic dislike. Social commentators could be self-reflexive in their acknowledgement of the reductive tendencies of this impulse to equate the human condition of the urban 'masses' to the aesthetic poverty of their surroundings. In his volume of essays, *In Peril of Change,* Masterman indicted H. G. Wells' fiction for its lack of empathy with the life of the 'average' citizen, and criticised Wells' olympian perspective from which he surveyed the urban masses:

> It is all a little cruel; too detached to be entirely pleasant: the author surveys the scrambling horde as the observer surveys the ant heap or the locust crowd with a cold resentment and contempt […] All his onslaught could be summed up in a single challenge. Stand in the street of any modern English city and watch the stream drift by of shuffling, shabby bodies […][7]

For Masterman, the lack of variety in Wellsian fiction, and its reductive tendency to aggregation and assertions of sameness, was suggestive of a lack of human sympathy. Similarly, he wrote in critical terms of Gissing's novels: 'with artistic power and detachment he constructs his sombre picture, till a sense of almost physical oppression comes upon the

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which the volume focussed: 'increasing monotony of occupation […] the dullness and dreariness of the districts'. His own contribution formulated and re-formulated the theme at length in a series of phrases: 'the monotonous, earth-directed lives of the masses'; 'the daily drift to monotonous occupations'; life has become 'a sort of nightmare, somnambulant progress through the unchanging monotonous days; and so on. F. W Lawrence's essay on 'The Housing Problem' wrote of 'streets and streets of monotonous houses'; Reginald Bray's essay on 'The Children of the Town' lamented that 'the lives of the children are monotonous'; whilst F. W. Head's essay on 'The Church and the People' wrote of the urban labourer: 'the main element of his life is monotony. The home life is monotonous, for there is no privacy. The working-time is monotonous, for there is no variety in the labour. The surroundings are monotonous, for all the dingy streets look alike'. Masterman, 'Preface', pp.viii-ix; Masterman, 'Realities at Home' pp.28, 38 and 49; F. W. Lawrence, 'The Housing Problem', p.62; Reginald Bray, 'The Children of the Town', p.129; F. W. Head, 'The Church and the People', p.262; all in *The Heart of the Empire.*
[7] Masterman, 'The Making of the Superman', in *In Peril of Change,* p.198.

reader, as in some strange and disordered dream.'[8] Yet Masterman's own writings can be characterised by these same critical standards; the sheer linguistic inventiveness with which he repeats, time and again, that working- and middle- class urban and suburban life is uniform, and uniformly monotonous, is itself oppressive. He both acknowledges that to portray humanity in the aggregate represents a failure of the artistic and critical imagination, indicative of intellectual cruelty and contempt, and represents the city in these same terms. Masterman wrote in terms of sardonic bafflement, for instance, of the attempts by Charles Booth and his 'staff of helpers' to map the intricacies of London: 'he issues seventeen stout volumes […] of brilliance and complexity. He confesses he is no nearer estimation at the end of it all.' For Masterman, 'London should not be a complicated study': 'London is an aggregation – amorphous and chaotic: six and a quarter millions of humanity. The aggregation is composed of a homogeneous substance: the City Dweller. […] Knowing the life of one, you know them all.[9] This paradoxical coexistence of sympathy with working-class lives and misanthropic pessimism about human worth in the urban 'crowd' – often within the writings of the same author – will be one of the recurring concerns of the chapter.

   A common theme in late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual and literary culture was that the lives of working- and lower-middle-class urbanites were characterised by mechanical submission to the daily grind of market-oriented work. Masterman characterised the attitude of 'the City Dweller' to everyday life as 'the grim seriousness of all things, the colossal monotony […] the moroseness even of pleasure'; 'considerable hours spent in not too exacting but conspicuously cheerless occupations.'[10] The dominant motif in such writings is of urban workers with their heads down, their horizons narrowed to economic necessity, and oblivious to the wider realities of nature and beauty that might give human life significance. Gissing, for example, wrote of slum life in *The Nether World:*

> At noon to-day there was sunlight on the Surrey hills; the fields and lanes were fragrant with the first breath of spring. […] But of these things Clerkenwell takes no count; here it had been a day like any other, consisting of so many hours, each representing a fraction of the weekly wage.[11]

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[8] Masterman, 'George Gissing', in *In Peril of Change,* p.70.
[9] Masterman, 'The Burden of London', p.160.
[10] Masterman, 'The Burden of London', p.159; 'The Suburbans' in *The Condition of England* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1909), p.90.
[11] George Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.10.

Throughout the novel, Gissing indicted urban life for its deadening of aesthetic sensibility. The novel's recurring motif, which contrasts natural beauty to the indifference of urbanites, is intended to reveal and condemn the psychological effects of mass urban life in the strongest possible terms: 'away to the west yonder the heavens are afire with sunset, but at that we do not care to look; never in our lives did we regard it. We do not know what is meant by beauty and grandeur.'[12] For Masterman, too, the loss of aesthetic and spiritual appreciation of natural beauty was a measure of the extent to which the modern city had failed its inhabitants.[13]

In Gissing's novels and Masterman's social commentary there is both an intense anger towards a social order that compelled the working classes to focus exclusively upon the economic necessities of survival, and a dismissive contempt that the urban 'masses' appeared to submit so routinely to the limiting of their own horizons. Their writings are dominated by the assertion that the 'average' urbanite neither apprehends nor appreciates beauty, and thus reduces the pursuit of pleasure to a mechanical impulse for shabby material comforts.[14] For Masterman, 'the dreariness of their lives does not depend on their poverty. […] the tragedy resides in their acquiescence: the absence of eager revolt and protest: the listless toleration of intolerable things. [They are] shabby, impotent, grotesquely negligible.'[15] On the one hand, these were the grounds upon which many writers advocated social reform: the hope that social reform might improve these conditions. On the other, it is indicative of an imaginative failure to conceptualise individuality in mass society: an inability to endow each individual with equal worth in an urban environment that seemed to blur individual difference, and to render the individual negligible. There is a reflex to dismiss the urban masses, and to resolve imaginative grappling with the complexity and multiplicity of human life in favour of a pessimistic disdain.

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[12] Gissing, *The Nether World*, p.110.

[13] For example, Masterman wrote in *The Heart of the Empire* that 'the spiritual world, whether in Nature, in Art, or in definite Religion, has vanished, and the curtain of the horizon has descended round the material things and the pitiful duration of human life In former time in England […] the things of the earth were shot with spiritual significance'. 'Realities at Home', pp.8-9.

[14] Indeed, the pleasures of urbanites were envisaged as uniformly shabby and pathetic in nature. Masterman wrote, for instance, of middlebrow novels and the 'yellow press', typical of suburban entertainment, that they were 'mean and tawdry and debased, representing a tawdry and dusty world'. The pleasures of slum life were similarly envisaged as primarily Sunday drinking, 'with its listless ennui', and '"mechanic pacing to and fro," varied only by occasional outbursts of brutalising and unlovely pleasure.' Masterman, *The Condition of England,* p.93; 'Realities at Home', pp.26 and 8.

[15] Masterman, 'The Burden of London', p.163.

Under this schema, diversity was conceived of as emptied of meaning: the aggregation of individuality simply shaded into the uniformity of the mass. In E. M. Forster's *Howards End,* London is a place of 'stupid sensate dullness' whose inhabitants, famously, fail to 'connect', both socially and psychologically. The cosmopolitan variety of city life is conceived of as essentially meaningless, and itself leading to a dull uniformity; the aggregation of the 'many-coloured efforts' of individuals results in a 'universal grey'.[16] Similarly, H. G. Wells wrote of shopping crowds on Oxford Street:

> This rich and abundant and ultimately aimless life, this tremendous spawning and proliferation of uneventful humanity! These individual lives signified no doubt enormously to the individuals, but did all the shining, reflecting, changing existence that went by like bubbles in a stream, signify collectively anything more than the […] confusion of shoaling mackerel?[17]

Such passages suggest that misanthropy was often a response to the experience of the modern city: there is a sense, in Wells' writing especially, that population growth, coupled with the historically unprecedented growth in the size of cities, devalued human life in proportion to its multiplication. But they also indicate a genuine difficulty of psychologically accepting the multiplicity of human life in the modern city, and evoke a sense of loss at the disappearance of the acuteness of meaning of individual lives in mass society. For Ford Madox Ford, this was not just an imaginative response of literary and intellectual elites; it was the very logic of the modern city. For Ford, the city itself tended to flatten human difference, because, in proportion to the vastness of the metropolis, 'any human achievement bulks very small'. London 'assimilates and slowly digests [its inhabitants], converting them, with the most potent of all juices, into the single and inevitable product that is the Londoner – that is, in fact, the Modern'. The logic of the modern city was thus to make inhabitants in its own image: 'flood[ing] over' the 'eccentricities' of human diversity, its influence 'spreads, like sepia in water, a tinge of its own all over the world.'[18]

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[16] E. M. Forster, *Howards End,* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.121.

[17] H. G. Wells, *Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp.412-3.

[18] Ford Madox Hueffer [=Ford], *The Soul of London – A Survey of a Modern City,* (1905; Read Books Ltd, 2011), pp.11-12.

Ford was also self-reflexive in the awareness that a recognition of the 'assimilating' tendencies of urban life was easily elided with a misanthropic and elitist impulse to disdain the lives of the urban 'masses'. He rebuked the intellectual tendency to conceive of urban inhabitants in a way that obscured (and thus devalued) individuality behind an aggregation of apparent uniformity, writing that the social observer 'must not only sniff at the "Suburbs" as a place of small houses and dreary lives; he must remember that in each of these houses dwells a strongly individualised human being with romantic hopes, romantic fears, and at the end, an always tragic death.'[19] Yet the reader notes both the qualification and the conscious reminder: 'he *must not only* sniff'; 'he must remember'. There is an acknowledgment of the tension between instinctive dislike of the suburban landscape and dismissal of suburban lives, and a deliberate, politically- and socially-motivated effort to remember the inherent worth and significance of each human life. Indeed, Lynne Hapgood writes of literary representations of the suburbs that 'the claim, not just for the intrinsic value of the ordinary, but for its almost Shakespearean grandeur seems more an intellectually articulated position than one of instinctive human sympathy.'[20] Ford's reminder to humanise the lives of 'ordinary' suburbanites operates less at the level of everyday realities than of aesthetic and narrative possibilities: the broad sweep of individual lives is apprehended as the object of aesthetic attention – their fear to be romanticised and their death sentimentalised – rather than subjects with which to empathise on equal terms.

Suburban novelists, in particular, offered a more optimistic picture of the human condition in a mass urbanised society by recovering the vital, inner lives of suburban inhabitants. Novelists such as Arnold Bennett and Shan Bullock represented suburban life in just such terms of instinctive human sympathy with the (apparently) ordinary. In *The Man from the North,* Arnold Bennett portrayed a London suburb as overflowing with human interest:

> Walk along this very street on such as Sunday afternoon as today. The roofs form two horrible, converging lines, I know, but beneath there is character, individuality, enough to make the greatest book ever written. […] How many houses are there in Carteret Street? Say eighty. Eighty theatres of love, hate, greed, tyranny, endeavour;

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[19] Ford, p.xv.

[20] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The suburbs in fiction and culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.173.

eighty separate dramas always unfolding, intertwining, ending, beginning – and every drama a tragedy.[21]

The terms are similar to Ford's, but more instinctively empathetic, and more readily willing to perceive beauty in suburban life. The novel's hero contemplates writing a book entitled *The Psychology of the Suburbs*, musing that it seemed 'that the latent poetry of the suburbs arose like a beautiful vapour and filled these monotonous and squalid vistas with the scent and colour of violets, leaving nothing common, nothing ignoble.'[22] Whereas, for an observer such as Ford, the aesthetic possibilities of biographical development might be superimposed upon apparently dreary daily realities, Bennett creates a sense of beauty unfolding from below, at street level, emerging from the commonplace and everyday. John Carey has noted of Bennett's writing that he 'gives us access to the realities that blaze and coruscate inside dowdy or commonplace bodies.'[23] Hapgood, too, writes that 'Bennett was intrigued by what constituted the ordinary, how much of the extraordinary the ordinary contained'; his characters have their own sense of 'the uniqueness of their own experience and the importance of their lives.' Refuting novelists such as Gissing's and Wells's vision of the suburbs as symptomatic of cultural decline, Bennett portrayed the lives of each suburbanite as 'a balance of ordinary external daily realities and extraordinary internal emotional or imaginative resources'.[24]

Whilst late Victorian and Edwardian literary culture is often thought of as unequivocally hostile to the mediocrity and uniformity of the suburbs, novelists such as Bennett and G. K. Chesterton envisaged suburbia as a realm of the extraordinary. For Chesterton especially, the apparent ordinariness of the suburbs concealed latent magical and fairy-tale elements: the suburban landscape was infused with imaginative power.[25] Arthur Conan Doyle and Keble Howard sought to portray suburban life as a refuge from urban ugliness and the economic competition of working life.[26]

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[21] Arnold Bennett, *The Man From the North* (London: Bodley Head, 1898), pp.102-3.
[22] Bennett, p.108.
[23] Carey, p.163.
[24] Hapgood, p.221.
[25] Michael D. Hurley, 'Why Chesterton Loved London' in Matthew Beaumont (ed), *G. K. Chesterton, London and Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp.20-1; Colin Cavendish-Jones, 'Estranging the Everyday: G. K. Chesterton's Urban Modernism', in Beaumont (ed), p.192; Hapgood, p.231.
[26] For example, Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Duet* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1903) and Keble Howard, *The Smiths of Surbiton* (London: Chapman Hall, 1906).

For Hapgood, female novelists especially portrayed the suburbs as a place of self-determination: by the same process that male writers disparaged the suburbs as emasculating, they offered to women an imaginative as well as physical space in which to develop a sense of individual power and agency.[27] The hostility of male writers such as Gissing towards the suburbs has often been identified with masculine anxieties and the 'flight from domesticity' in late Victorian and Edwardian culture.[28] In Gissing's *The Whirlpool*, for instance, the suburban emphasis on domestic comforts and bourgeois amenities is seen as symptomatic of cultural degeneration and decline. One route of escape from the stifling atmosphere of suburban existence, common in the period's literature, is to seek both stimulation and redemption amid the rugged masculinity and hardships of untamed nature on the imperial frontier.[29] Yet, in contrast to perspectives such as Gissing's, in which the suburbs become the ultimate site of enervating disenchantment (and, indeed, emasculation), Hapgood notes that women's suburban writing is characterised precisely by the 'capacity to "dream", to evoke other worlds within the material suburb.'[30] The popular late Victorian and Edwardian genre of "garden romance" novels portrayed women as experiencing elements of the primitive and the erotic amid the quotidian activity of domestic life. For writers such as Elizabeth von Arnim and Barbara Campbell, suburban gardens provided a space in which female protagonists could shape their self-discovery and identity in *rus in urbe,* surroundings.[31] Whilst, as we saw in chapter two, women writers of the city contended with their own consciousness of marginality and transgression in urban space, female suburban writers represented gardens in strongly feminised terms. Husbands and fathers are welcome to enter these gardens, but only as observers, or helpers in executing the protagonist's vision; the suburbs thus become envisaged a private space of female empowerment and progress.[32] Wendy Gan argues, too, that gardens in von Arnim and Campbell's novels, by providing an enclosed space of escape and privacy, allowed female protagonists to develop individual

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[27] See discussion of the suburban novels of Alice Askew, Sophie Cole, Louise Gerrard and Mary Hamilton in Hapgood, pp.141-65.

[28] For example, see historiographical discussion in Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal,* 45 (3), (2002), esp. pp.640-1.

[29] George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (1897; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), pp.11-13.

[30] Hapgood, p.12.

[31] For example, Barbara Campbell, *The Garden of a Commuter's Wife* (London: Macmillan, 1901); Elizabeth von Arnim, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898; London: Virago, 1985).
For further discussion of garden romances, see Hapgood, pp.92-111. For further discussion of urban and suburban gardens, see Chapter 6, 'The Cleansing of England'.

[32] Hapgood, p.93.

identities apart from those of wives and mothers.[33] In Campbell's *The Garden of a Commuter's Wife,* for instance, the suburban garden becomes a place in which to cultivate a more intense sensuality and exoticised subjectivity. Campbell writes: 'closing my eyes and merely breathing in fragrance and sound, I was no longer the commuter's wife who breakfasts at seven […] but a Lotus Eater listening to the nightingale.'[34]

Yet, in illuminating the extraordinarily acute inner lives of ordinary men and women, many suburban novelists offered an intensely ambivalent picture of suburban life. Acknowledgment of the vitality of the inner lives of each individual carried with it the fact that so many individuals led lives whose horizons were strictly limited. If suburban fiction claimed the suburbs as a territory in which the working- and lower-middle classes could elucidate their emotional lives – a setting in which they could be heroes and heroines – for many novelists this was tinged with more than a touch of pathos. As Bennett indicated: 'and every drama a tragedy.' In Shan Bullock's *Robert Thorne: the story of a London clerk,* for example, the protagonist realises that the life of a clerk is 'heroic pretence'. They step 'valiantly to work' each day, yet receive no compensation for their daily struggle: 'our houses are jerry-built, our clothes are shoddy, our food adulterated, ourselves not what we are.'[35] The tragedy is that the protagonist knows this – and believes that each individual within his class is aware of this wider social reality – but must accept the nature of the sacrifice in order to maintain the social order; they are heroic because they endure this knowledge. As Hapgood writes, the suburbs thus offer

> the possibility of domesticity, personal value and self-betterment, but at the cost of public conformity and anonymity and, worse, of a commitment to the economic treadmill. The personal values cultivated in the suburb – honesty, hard work and domestic stability – are commendable public virtues, but also ones on which capitalism is able to build a compliant workforce.[36]

For Bullock, acquiescence to the social and economic order was indicative of the heroism of 'ordinary' urbanites. The 'worm's eye view' of clerical workers illuminates both their acceptance of the social order, and their critical awareness of the nature of this compliance:

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[33] Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.34-5.
[34] Campbell, pp.269-70.
[35] Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne: the story of a London clerk* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p.249.
[36] Hapgood, p.182.

acquiescence to the mechanical logic of industrialism does not dull their emotional or aesthetic sensitivity.

Yet many suburban novelists provided a detached perspective from which to observe the urban and suburban 'masses', which partially replicated the olympian perspective of social commentators and self-consciously aloof modernist or naturalist writers. Writing of the suburban novels of William Pett Ridge and Edwin Pugh, Hapgood argues that 'the fact that each writer was effectively declassed by his success had a considerable influence on their material. […] there is a clear sense that they are looking back towards a world that they chose to leave'.[37] Often, writers' instinctive empathy is with characters that seem to feel the reality of their lives more acutely than those around them. In Pett Ridge's *Mord Em'ly,* the protagonist experiences an intense claustrophobia as she observes the uniformity of suburban streets, in which 'No. 18 was precisely like No. 17, and like No. 19'. Acquiescence is less heroic than pathological: 'that people should so carefully abstain from taking advantage with both hands of the happiness that life offers' appears to her 'to be a minor form of insanity.'[38]

Many working-class autobiographers similarly presented their own emotional lives in these terms, constructing their subjectivities as more acutely aware of life's possibilities, and more intensely alert to wider social realities. The diarist W. N. P. Barbellion, for example, vented adolescent frustration at working-class and bourgeois compliance with the limited horizons of work-a-day life:

> I sometimes envy the zealot with a definite mission in life. Life without one seems void. The monotonous pursuit of our daily vocations – the soldier, sailor, candlestick maker – so they go on, never living but only hypnotising themselves by the routine and punctuality of their lives into just so many mechanical toys warranted to go for so long and then stop when Death takes them… It amazes me that men must spend their precious days of existence for the most part in slaving for food and clothing and the bare necessities of existence.[39]

The working-class autodidact George Acorn (though his autobiography nominally identified the author as *One of the Multitude*) similarly constructed his subjectivity in terms of distinction from his fellow slum-dwellers: 'I was well aware that I had little in common with my companions and environment. […] I had too much self-esteem quietly to accept the social

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[37] Hapgood, p.174.
[38] William Pett Ridge, *Mord Em'ly* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1901), p.42.
[39] W. N P. Barbellion [pseud] *The Journal of a Disappointed Man,* (1919; London, Hogarth Press, 1984), p.30.

status in which I found myself, whereas, so far as I could see, my companions were not only contented, but had never thought of questioning their lives.'[40]

Whilst suburban novelists and working-class autobiographers alike illuminated the emotional sensitivities and vital inner lives that lay hidden within the apparent uniformity of 'ordinary' urbanites, they also, by this same process, often located this subjectivity only within themselves or the protagonists of their narratives. Often, they did not extend the acuteness of their own emotional and aesthetic sensitivities to those around them; their emphasis was on the individuality of one, rather than the individuality of all. Indeed, the individuality of one was constructed *against* the very uniformity of others: individual protest emerges from a wider social background of unthinking acquiescence. In parallel to the ambivalence of intellectual elites, they reveal the same tension between the desire to humanise the individual, and the instinct to homogenise the 'mass'.

The 'Crowd' and the 'Mass'

The anxieties of social commentators that the lives of 'ordinary' urbanites were characterised by a deadened sensibility and passive acceptance of the social order existed, seemingly paradoxically, in parallel to fears that city life was productive of restlessness and social disorder. Charles Masterman, for example, vacillated between lamenting the 'tragedy' of working-class 'acquiescence' to the social order, and voicing repeated concern that their 'pent up' grievances might one day erupt violently into social protest. Writing in the aftermath of Mafficking during the Boer War, he apprehensively envisaged 'the turmoil of the coming flood and the tramp of many footsteps.' He imagined the urban masses emerging from underground railways 'like rats from a drain', surging through the streets and evading the police 'like an elephant dispersing flies', writing of his fear that the modern city was 'fermenting […] some new, all-powerful explosive.'[41] Andrew Lees has written of these fears that, for liberal and conservative observers alike, 'urban society was becoming spatially and

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[40] George Acorn [pseud], *One of the Multitude* (London: William Heinemann, 1911), p.81.
[41] Masterman, *From the Abyss,* p.2.

socially segregated in ways that greatly intensified conflicts among classes and increased the possibility of revolutionary attempts from below.'[42]

These paradoxical dual anxieties emerged, in part, from the two dominant ways of conceptualising the urban population as a 'crowd' or 'mass'. On the one hand, the socialist-romantic critique of industrialism produced an image of urbanites in mechanical submission to working life, unable to apprehend life's wider aesthetic possibilities, their energies misdirected into pursuit of the 'sham' wants of industrial capitalism. On the other, the influence of crowd theory, popularised by Gustave le Bon, was suggestive that, as the population was driven into ever-closer proximity in the modern city, the urban crowd sapped individuals of rational control and gained a mind of its own.[43] In the romantic critique of industrialism, individual difference was seen to be flattened by the rationalising logic of utilitarianism; under the influence of crowd theory, individuality could be envisaged as subsumed into the dangerously irrational forces of the crowd.

The interplay of these two social explanations created two (seemingly mutually exclusive) anxieties that existed in parallel to one another: under the dehumanising conditions of the modern industrial city, humanity was seen to be becoming both mechanical and animal in nature. Hence Masterman both worried that life in cities, divorced from the influences of nature and spirituality, was reduced to mere 'mechanic pacing to and fro', and wrote of the 'pent-up' energies urban crowd: '"The visible becomes the Bestial," says Carlyle, "when it rests not on the invisible."'[44] Similarly, whilst Reginald Bray lamented that urban life was, for children, characterised by a deadening monotony and a lack of educational and emotional stimulation by the influence of nature, he also wrote in terms of the pathological emotional excitement caused by the influence of the crowd:

> No one can wander along the crowded roads on a Saturday evening, when the whole world is tossing down the pavement like some stormy sea, without being seized by a curious thrill of excitement. There is something more in a crowd than a mere collection of individuals; it possesses a character of its own as a whole […] A multitude of living beings has a strange intoxicating effect and awakened the consciousness as of some giant power latent indeed, but yet visibly felt […] once they

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[42] Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought,* 1820-1940 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.168-9.
[43] Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895); see also discussion of le Bon's influence upon urban theory in Lees, p.171, and McClelland, pp.8-20 and 196-237.
[44] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', pp.28 and 32.

[children] have been subjected to this crowd-passion, [they] crave for a repetition of this emotion.[45]

Key to understanding these twin anxieties of plebeian acceptance of, and refusal to accept, the social order is the contemporary understanding of the crowd as both more, and less, than the sum of its parts. Within the crowded conditions of cities, individuals were envisaged at once as both more and less individualised: more in the sense that their emotions were excited (which, in wider intellectual thought, was to be celebrated to the extent that it overcame the dull monotony of urban lives, and feared to the extent that it undermined social order), and less in the sense that it undermined the sense of rational self-control (which was to be praised to the extent that it restored natural and vital emotions to otherwise mechanical lives, and condemned to the extent that it privileged the regressive and bestial elements of human nature). Metaphors which drew individual urban inhabitants into a collective, such as the 'crowd' or the 'mass', were thus rarely neutral, because they dramatised so many ideological tensions and ambivalences in late Victorian and Edwardian culture: ones which drew upon long-standing questions about the nature of self and society in Western intellectual thought, yet which seemed to contemporaries to be of historically unprecedented immediacy and importance amid the growth of modern cities.

In this way, the 'mass' aroused both contempt and panic in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, symbolising at once the dehumanising effects of the modern city, the dull uniformity of its inhabitants, and the anxiety inducing multiplicity of human life. In *The Intellectuals and the Masses,* John Carey argued that the 'mass' functioned as a linguistic device to 'eliminate the human status of the majority of people – or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make users of the term, in their own esteem, superior.' He views this as a primarily elitist response – a defensive attempt to exclude the urban masses from high culture in the face of rising literacy rates, and to re-state intellectual superiority.[46] Whilst Carey's argument for the near-genocidal proclivities of modernism has been roundly criticised, it is certainly true that late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual and literary culture was pervaded by aggregating and dehumanising metaphors for the mass, and a contempt for massed humanity in the abstract.[47] Masterman was perhaps the most inventive in his

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[45] Bray, pp.125-6.
[46] Carey, 'Preface' and pp.16-21.
[47] Jonathan Rose has criticised Carey's 'blunt[ly] populist' approach, yet broadly accepts Carey's argument for modernist intellectuals' phobia of the working classes. Hilton Kramer contended that Carey vastly exaggerated

formulations for the urban mass: the crowd is envisaged as 'a mass of blurred humanity'; 'the unparalleled masses of the obscure'; 'a kind of human ant-heap'; 'an interminable acreage of crowded humanity', and so on.[48] A common theme in slum novels is the spectacle of bank holiday crowds, which were frequently written to evoke both horror and disdain at the sheer multiplicity of ugly bodies and insignificant lives. In *The Nether World,* for example, Gissing wrote of crowds watching a fireworks display at Crystal Palace:

> It is a great review of the People. On the whole how respectable they are, how sober, how deadly dull! See how worn-out the poor girls are becoming, how they gape, what listless eyes most of them have! [...] Observe the middle-aged women; it would be small surprise that their good looks had vanished, but whence comes it they are animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness? Mark the men in their turn; four in every six have visages so deformed by ill-health that they excite disgust. [...] A great review of the People. Since man came into being did the world ever exhibit a sadder spectacle?[49]

The perspective from which social commentators and novelists observed the urban crowd is generally an olympian one: the urban-working classes are surveyed from above, and at a distance. It is a perspective that seems to have made observers particularly prone to disdain and misanthropy. Masterman, for instance, feared that modern urban life entailed 'the elimination of the highest and lowest elements of human nature'. In the city, man was 'rubbing his social angles down'; in the future, everything would be 'ordered, smooth, clean, similar'. The typical urbanite would be 'whitewashed': 'industrious, vacant, cheerful, untroubled by envy, aspiration or desire.' Yet these fears derived more from Masterman's

the extent of elite misanthropy, whilst acknowledging the presence of disdainful attitudes towards the working classes, writing of *The Intellectuals and the Masses* that 'conventional snobberies, in this account, become genocidal impulses'. Kramer, too, attacked Carey's 'hatred of modernism' and his uncritical assertion of its 'anti-popular' character: 'he has no grasp of the real dynamics that govern the interplay of modernist culture and mainstream cultural life in modern societies. He is simply out to destroy the prestige of the high culture that he believes to be inimical to democracy'. Whilst broadly approving of Carey's populism, Ian Hamilton noted that 'there is an ever-present risk that Carey's generalising bent might go berserk, so that all bad things in the world can be traced back to a few authors of the Modernist persuasion'. In his highly critical essay 'With Friends Like These', Stefan Collini writes of Carey's approach that it is both 'unworthy' as literary criticism, and a 'shoddy piece of cultural history'. Collini argues that, whilst the disdain of many modernist writers for the 'masses' is well known, Carey's determination to '*épater les intellectuels* has warped his judgement': 'the requisite grasp of the interplay of intellectual traditions and individual situations, and the corresponding sensitivity to tone and nuance, have been overridden by [...] forensic brutality.'
Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.393-4; Hilton Kramer, 'Review: *The Intellectuals and the Masses*', *The New Criterion,* 12 (5), January 1994, p.4; Ian Hamilton, 'Evil Days', *London Review of Books,* 14 (14), July 1992, pp.9-10; Stefan Collini, 'With Friends Like These: John Carey and Noel Annan', in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.292-7.
[48] Masterman, *In Peril of Change,* pp. 162 and 178; 'Realities at Home', pp. 11 and 16.
[49] Gissing, *The Nether World,* pp.109-10.

own mode of observing urban life than from social analysis: aesthetic distaste became the grounds for social prophecy. At his most pessimistic and misanthropic, he wrote of the appearance of the urban masses from afar:

> It is in the city Crowd, where the traits of individual distinction have become merged in the aggregate, and the impression (from a distance) is of little white blobs of faces borne upon little black twisted or misshapen bodies, that the scorn of the philosopher for the mob, the cynic for humanity, becomes for the first time intelligible.[50]

Whilst this olympian perspective predisposed intellectual observers towards a dismissive and misanthropic contempt for humanity in the aggregate, it was also productive of anxieties. Urban society could equally appear as a swarm, or mob, comprised of faceless and undifferentiated beings whose putative unknowability could appear as threatening to the observer.

Yet another response to overcrowded urban conditions was a sense of social guilt. This was the stated position of *The Heart of the Empire,* edited by Masterman. F. W. Lawrence's essay on 'The Housing Problem' attempted to defamiliarise the pervasiveness of urban poverty for his readers, and to humanise the individuals of which the 'mass' was comprised, writing of the statistic that 8-10% of Londoners lived in slums and one-room tenements:

> there are three hundred thousand people in London who are huddled together in families in this way, and denied anything of what can be called a home. We are so used to hearing this spoken of that it has lost a great deal of the meaning which it would otherwise have for us. These people are creatures of like flesh and blood as yourself, the reader of this article; their daily needs are the same, their senses are of a similar nature[.] Try and picture just one day of such a family.[51]

Lawrence continued to elaborate upon the disparity between aggregated statistics of London's population, and the lived realities of social inequality: 'Six millions of people! […] It is only when we come down to the individual […] that we begin to wonder whether after all some sort of shame ought not to be attached to it if as a necessary consequence so much misery is entailed.'[52] Whilst Masterman's essay in particular is suffused with misanthropic and dehumanising descriptions of the urban population, it also placed the blame squarely upon industrial-capitalist social elites: 'the waste of the incalculable mass of human nature

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[50] Masterman, 'The Multitude', *The Condition of England,* p.121.
[51] F. W. Lawrence, pp.66-7.
[52] F. W. Lawrence, pp.71-2.

seems something that surely will one day demand explanation and requital.'[53] His writings display both fears of social disorder, and anxieties that working-class life was characterised by passive acceptance of social conditions; yet the emphasis was often upon indicting the social order for creating this choice between two equally undesirable alternatives. Andrew Lees has written that 'no one in Britain did more during the years just after 1900 to publicise the ills of British urban society' than Masterman; 'several of his studies constituted the most thoughtful expression of misgivings about contemporary cities published by anyone in Britain during the early twentieth century.'[54] Masterman, at times, was deeply sensitive to the lives of individuals within the urban crowd, writing of working in the slums of East London: 'those who have lived with and learnt to love its labouring peoples, with their indomitable cheerfulness, pluck, and endurance […]'.[55] It is thus deeply significant that he, like many other social observers, often struggled to conceptualise the mass or the crowd in less pessimistic terms: under a different aspect, 'indomitable cheerfulness' and 'endurance', for instance, could turn to 'fatuous cheerfulness', 'dull persistence in routine' and 'listless toleration'.[56] There is both an awareness that the crowd is no more or less than the sum of its constituent individuals, and an inability to maintain this awareness in the face of an instinctive aesthetic aversion to humanity in the aggregate.

The 'View from Below'?

   The autobiographies of Labour politicians, which reflected upon authors' first-hand experiences of urban poverty during their youth, offer a very different perspective upon the urban crowd. Individuals who had found political success later in life often sought to identify themselves with the crowd, and to present themselves as at 'home' within it. Henry Snell (later Lord Snell), the son of agricultural labourers, wrote of his excitement upon moving to London for the first time and walking through its 'teeming streets'. Snell couched his youthful enjoyment of wandering through the urban crowd in a literary pedigree, as if to self-consciously provide a justification for departing from pastoral and anti-urban conventions: 'to justify this habit I fall back upon the great names of the past. Did not old Sam Johnson have a similar weakness? […] And did not Walt Whitman find peace and inspiration in the teeming

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[53] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', p.49.
[54] Lees, p.155.
[55] Masterman, 'The Religion of the City', *In Peril of Change,* p.285.
[56] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', pp.29 and 32; 'The Burden of London', p.163

streets of Manhattan?'[57] Autobiographers could experience a sense of romantic excitement in walking through crowded city streets; unsurprisingly, observers from 'within' the mass were often much less likely to sense the crowd as a threatening presence than were observers from a higher social class, who surveyed the urban masses from a distance. Jonathan Rose has noted of this tendency that 'where a middle-class intellectual might feel engulfed and oppressed by the urban masses, the same crowds could be endlessly stimulating to proletarian writers'; the spectacle of bustling crowds and teeming streets could be indicative of 'the brilliance of metropolitan life', self-education and cultural opportunity.[58]

Whilst Labour politicians also wrote of their negative experiences of overcrowded slums, and the overwhelming scale of urban poverty, their autobiographies frequently presented their experiences in very different terms to 'slumming' intellectuals who sought to effect political change through accounts of their occasional descents into the social abyss. A common trope in working-class autobiographical writing was to evoke the gradual awakening of the author's political consciousness, in which instinctive human sympathy was shaped, over time, into a sense of political injustice. Childhood questioning of the order of things was portrayed as the basis of political action. Arthur Collinson wrote in his unpublished *Autobiography of an old-time trade unionist,* for example: 'I accepted the "pie in the sky, by-and-by", with a childlike simplicity, though I often queried it to myself and wondered why there was such a shortage of "pie" for the multitude of folk like ourselves.'[59] Whereas written accounts of 'slum tourism' tended to begin with an initial sense of horror at the spectacle of the urban masses, and proceeded towards sympathetic and humanising encounters with suffering individuals, autobiographers tended to invert this process. They offered narratives of their lives in which instinctive empathy with the urban poor propelled them out of the slums in order to change the social order from below. Both perspectives envisaged the working classes as victims of social and economic structure, yet the latter, naturally,

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[57] Henry Snell, *Men, Movements and Myself* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1936), pp.77-8.
That Snell associated his own flânerie with such literary precursors contrasts with what Judith Walkowitz (following Richard Sennett) has written about working-class access to modes of urban cosmopolitanism. Walkowitz argued that the cosmopolitan enjoyment of diversity in the city was a characteristically privileged gaze, which 'established a right to the city – a right not traditionally available to, often not even part of, the imaginative repertoire of the less advantaged.' Snell's sense of 'being at home' in the city explicitly laid claim to such an imaginative repertoire.
Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p.16; Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.135-7).
[58] Rose, *Intellectual Life,* p.410.
[59] Arthur Collinson, 'One way only: an autobiography of an old- time trade unionist', TS, 3:30, Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies, p.6.

recognised more instinctively the agency of individuals in the 'crowd' – even if that agency needed to be galvanised by political leadership.

Yet many working-class autodidacts, reflecting upon their earlier lives from a position of intellectual or literary success, conceptualised their own experience of the urban crowd in terms of threat and anxiety. Robert Blatchford recalled entering London from the comparative quiet of Suffolk as a young man in the 1870s, walking among the crowds of Fleet Street and the Strand: 'the people seemed to me, in my lonesome, anxious mood, a hard-faced, sharp-set, unkindly mob.'[60] Edwin Muir evinced a similar sense of anxiety in the presence of the urban masses, and reflected upon the difficulty of emotionally adjusting from a rural to an urban mentality. Walking through the crowded slums of Glasgow, he experienced a

> deep sense of degradation: the crumbling houses, the twisted faces, the obscene words casually heard in passing, the ancient, haunting stench of pollution and decay, the arrogant women, the mean men, the terrible children, frightened me, and at last filled me with an immense, blind dejection. I shrank from [them] and quickly learned not to see.

Muir reveals the conscious emotional strategies and coping mechanisms at work in dispelling anxieties about urban life:

> After a while, like everyone who lives in an industrial town, I got used to these things; I walked through the slums as if they were an ordinary road leading from my home to my work. I learned to do this consciously, but if I was tired or ill I often had the feeling, passing through Eglinton Street or Crown Street, that I was dangerously close to the ground, deep down in a place from which I might never be able to climb up again. […] These fears might come on me at any time, and then, though I lived in a decent house, the slums seemed to be everywhere around me, a great, spreading swamp into which I might sink forever.[61]

The sense of psychological isolation and alienation from the urban crowd, and an almost existential horror at the spectacle of massed humanity, is not uncommon amongst autobiographers. Autobiographers described their emotional difficulties in reconciling their own individuality and self-consciousness with the presence of the urban masses. George Acorn (not, as one might expect, an only child) wrote of his childhood in a London slum: 'I

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[60] Robert Blatchford, *My Eighty Years* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1931), pp.70-1.
[61] Edwin Muir, *The Story and the Fable* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1940), p.107.

often used to think about the essential loneliness of everybody. I was conscious of being I, and aware, of course, that everybody else was an "I" too.'[62] Regenia Gagnier has written of subjectivity in working-class autobiography that, once autobiographers established their own identity as 'a unique, psychologized self, significantly more complex than other workers,' the consequence was that authors 'frequently worried about their "egotism"'.[63] This sense of disconnection, of discontinuity between the inner sense of self and the lives of others seems to have been an intense concern for several authors. The urban crowd could be envisaged as a dangerous presence, threatening the acuteness of the individual's sense of self. W. N. P. Barbellion wrote of life in the city:

> For any one who is not simply a Sheep or Cow or whose nervous organisation is a degree more sensitive than the village blacksmith's, it is a besetting peril to his peace of mind to be constantly moving about an independent being, with loves and hates, and a separate identity among other separate identities, who prowl and prowl around like the hosts of Midian – ready to snarl, fight, seize you, bore you, exasperate you, to arouse all your passions, call up all the worst from the depths where they have lain hidden […] A day spent among my fellows goads me into a frenzy by the evening. I am no longer fit for human companionship. People string me up to concert pitch.[64]

The language used to describe the urban crowd is overwhelmingly dehumanising: 'prowl', 'snarl'. It is remarkably similar to the linguistic strategies employed by the literary intelligentsia to describe the urban masses. Whilst John Carey envisages this tendency to disdain massed humanity in the abstract as a modernist and elitist response, many observers from 'within' the mass seem to have felt a sense of isolation and detachment from the urban population, in a manner Carey associates solely with intellectual snobbery. Kathleen Woodward, writing of her childhood in an East End slum, dreaming of 'wild, impossible escape', vented misanthropic rage against her fellow slum-dwellers:

> I was nearly twelve. How I sickened of people; loathing them! From morning until night, and again in the morning: people, people, in travail with their insufferable

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[62] George Acorn [pseud], *One of the Multitude,* (London: William Heinemann, 1911), p.56.

[63] Regenia Gagnier, 'Social Atoms: Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity, and Gender', *Victorian Studies*, 30:3, Spring 1987, pp.360 and 340.
Julie-Marie Strange (following Gagnier) writes of this tension between the individual and the 'mass' that autobiographers such as Acorn 'could simultaneously assert their ordinariness […] and claim individual agency; this did not overcome anxieties about the ego and many plebeian authors who insisted on differentiating a personal tale found it difficult to express their story.' See Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class,* 1865-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.29; Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: a history of self-representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.144.

[64] W. N. P. Barbellion [pseud], *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* (1919; London, Hogarth Press, 1984), p.101.

burdens. […] I shrank from them because they scattered and refuted my dreams, with their tired eyes and indomitable endurance: subtle, insidious enemies of revolt, with their forlorn, wooden acceptance of the intolerable burden of life in Jipping Street. Going on and on from the beginning to the end; from the sticky, shiny, smelling perambulator – with a teat stuffed in your mouth to keep you quiet – to the grave or, like Miss Le Grand, to the workhouse.[65]

Similarly, George Acorn wrote of his neighbours in a London slum:

these people lead mechanical lives. It is appalling that so many of our neighbours should go through life without even an elementary knowledge of decent conduct, should, live, marry, produce children, fight, quarrel, all by rote, and never think […] The mind is not used at all; it is simply animal against animal, via conventional routes.[66]

Such misanthropy was, it seems, partly intellectual snobbery: both Acorn and Woodward were avid readers from childhood, consciously aware of the fact that their intellectual curiosity set them apart from those around them (Woodward later became a successful journalist).[67] In contrast with the autobiographies of Labour politicians, they identified more with the literary intelligentsia than their fellow slum-dwellers. Notably, negative views towards the urban crowd, and a tendency to view massed humanity in the abstract, are more common in published memoirs than unpublished accounts, and more common still amongst those who joined the literary intelligentsia later in life – indicating that there is an element of confirmation bias in the source base. The unpublished memoir of Frank Goss, for example, reveals a more sympathetic conceptualisation of the crowded London streets:

The road glistened in the paths of the street lamps. The shops threw their beams of light across the pavements. Passing through the main shopping centre to the sound of the clip-clopping of the horses' hooves, I drank in the colourful scene where men, women and children, moving in the yellow lights from shop doors and windows, hustled and jostled each other or went in and out of the shops to make late purchases;

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[65] Kathleen Woodward, *Jipping Street* (1928; London: Virago Press, 1983), pp.48-9.

[66] Acorn, pp.65-6. Indeed, Julie-Marie strange notes of Acorn's autobiography that 'so much of [it] is dedicated to distancing himself from the vulgarities of the poor.' Julie-Marie Strange, *Death Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.73.

[67] Jonathan Rose notes that Acorn's childhood reading practices heavily influenced how he conceptualised his own experience: 'Acorn's account does sounds suspiciously Dickensian, […] and he may well have recast his own life in the same melodramatic mode.' Julie-Marie Strange notes, however, that this by no means diminishes the value of Acorn's narrative to the historian: 'Acorn's autobiographical style probably borrowed heavily from his favourite literature (Dickens) but […] if anything, it shows how important the consumption of cultural texts was in working-class authors' attempts to give meaning to their life stories.' Moreover, she writes that intellectually curious autodidacts such as Acorn equally drew upon their reading to shape a sense of common human sympathy as much as they did in distinguishing themselves from others. Rose, *Intellectual Life,* pp,111-2; Strange, *Fatherhood*, p.163.

and all looking like a mass of bees hovering about and darting in and out of the doors of their hives.[68]

The authors of unpublished autobiographies very rarely describe life in the late Victorian and Edwardian period in terms of fear of the urban crowd, or a misanthropic disdain towards their fellow urbanites. In part, it seems that the more socio-economically 'ordinary' source base of unpublished autobiographers was less preoccupied by the anxieties of culturally and intellectually ambitious autodidacts, who often wrote their autobiographies from a position of political or literary acclaim. Yet unpublished autobiographies are often more domesticated accounts than are their published counterparts. The former tended to focus on the author's own experience, and his or her family and bounded community, from a point of view of belonging; the latter were often more self-consciously intellectualised accounts that related the meaning of the author's own experience to narrative structures, intellectual theories, reflections upon the human condition, and wider social processes. Whilst their accounts of urban poverty are shaped by a sense of having been de-classed by their success, there is also an intense ambivalence that arises from the status or meaning of this achievement.

Misanthropy and its Alternatives

Working-class autobiographers reveal an emotional complexity to misanthropic and pessimistic attitudes towards the urban poor: misanthropy was an easier position to assume than its alternative. It could preclude intense emotional suffering through empathy with the urban poor – with those struggling under 'the intolerable burden of life.' Edwin Muir, reflecting on his youth in Glasgow from a more humane standpoint, expressed genuine shock at his youthful Nietzscheanism and pitiless regard for the urban working class. But he considered, in hindsight, that a misanthropic contempt for his fellow clerical workers was a way of coping with his own anxiety: 'actually, although I did not know it, my Nietzscheanism was what psychologists call a "compensation." I could not face my life as it was, and so I took refuge in the fantasy of the Superman'. Recalling the disgust and horror he felt when gazing at the crowds of commuters in a tramcar, he wrote that

I should be astonished at the perversity with which, against my natural inclinations, my judgement, and my everyday experience, I clung to a philosophy so little suited to

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[68] Frank Goss, 'My Boyhood at the Turn of the Century', TS , 2:331, Burnett Archive, p.41.

a clerk in a beer-bottling factory, if I did not realise that it was a "compensation" without which I should have found it hard to face up to life at all. 'Be Hard' was one of Nietzsche's exhortations, but I was not hard enough even to give up Nietzsche.[69]

Muir, in a more humane disposition, conveys an almost unbearable sense of anguish over the human condition in the modern city:

> The thought that life can be for tens of thousands what it was to me after I came to Glasgow – and far worse, for I never lived in a slum – painfully troubles me; for it means that human life can be made up of rubbish streaked with all the great major catastrophes of human life, like a pudding made of cheap ingredients, except for the tragedy, which is real.[70]

Muir conceptualised his ambivalence towards the urban poor in terms of his youthful intellectual influences. He was 'deeply repelled' upon first reading Dostoevsky, 'because he brought human suffering home to me in an uncomfortable way, […] his grimy world was too close to the grimy life I had cast behind me.' Still under the influence of Nietzsche, he theorised desperately that a rejection of the responsibility to empathise with human suffering might be both an emotional coping mechanism, and an intellectually and morally stable position: 'I clung to the belief that pity was the deepest treachery to man's ultimate hope.'[71] Throughout his autobiography, Muir associated his impulse to human sympathy with his youthful love of Heine: discovering his poetry as a teenager, Muir wrote that 'tears came to my eyes as I read, "Yes, I know that there shall come a day when all men and women will be free and beautiful and live on this earth in joy." I read over and over again such passages.'[72] Yet as his adolescent faith in the possibility of a better future waned, Muir suggested that his 'pity' for the urban poor became unbearable. The tension between his instinct to seek emotional insulation in repulsion from the urban masses, and to maintain a humanistic sense of sympathy at the expense of his own emotional suffering, is thus narrated in terms of the influence of Nietzsche vs Heine. Muir conceptualised this as the tension between a coldly rational, supposedly 'intellectual honesty', and a truer emotional honesty:

> Even when in the midst of all this I was plunged again into squalor on a scale which I had never known before I still remained intellectually a Nietzschean. To support myself I adopted the watchword of 'intellectual honesty,' and in its name committed

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[69] Muir, *The Story and the Fable,* p.151
[70] Muir, *The Story and the Fable,* pp.151 and 129-30.
[71] Muir, *An Autobiography* (1954; Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1993), p.116
[72] Muir, *An Autobiography,* p.118.

every conceivable sin against the world with which I daily came into contact. […] Without admitting it I was very unhappy, and dishonest as well.[73]

Muir's recollection of his experience of urban poverty is defined by this struggle to find a way of conceptualising the urban poor as a whole that is at once intellectually, morally, and emotionally stable. His almost unbearable ambivalence towards the human condition in the modern city arises from the fact that misanthropic disdain was by far the easiest attitude with which to approach the urban masses, but it represented a failure of humanism; yet human sympathy within an intolerable social order that seemed unlikely to improve entailed immense personal anguish.

Several autobiographers were consciously aware that, in maintaining a sense of sensitivity and sympathy amid the suffering of working-class urban life, they had placed themselves at the very edge of what they were able to emotionally cope with. James Whittaker wrote of his sensitivity, as a child, in an Edinburgh slum: '"Softies" have a hellish and miserable existence among slum-kids: their life becomes a sheer hell upon earth.' [74] Kathleen Woodward was aware that fear and anxiety was the emotional price one paid for maintaining a sense of hope, and refusing to emotionally accept the privations of slum life. She wrote of her mother's 'grim acceptance of life':

> I like to think that mother once knew hope […] though she soon put away hope and fear and grew to suffer life as it came each day with a fine, flinty endurance; hardened with suffering, without illusions as she was without hope; enduring in proud obstinacy, without fear. Proud, obstinate, fearless, without hope and without that last noble extremity of courage which dares to hope […] she did not ask and she did not receive; the suffering had bitten in until it was itself impotent against the granite it laid bare.[75]

Whilst a social observer such as Masterman might have written dismissively of the 'fatuous' acquiescence of working-class life, autobiographers are suggestive of the inner processes at work behind the emotional acceptance of poverty. Woodward was aware that her own refusal to harden herself, to become emotionally calloused, or to resign herself emotionally to her surroundings created almost intolerable levels of anxiety and anguish. Writing of her young adulthood, Woodward anatomised the difficulty of coming to terms with the realities of urban

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[73] Muir, *An Autobiography,* p.119.
[74] James Whittaker, *I, James Whittaker* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1934), p.21.
[75] Woodward, pp.5-7.

poverty, describing the emotional processes at work in choosing between acceptance and hope:

> I had lost my dreams and I grew away from the people in Jipping Street who consoled my childhood, because they accepted without question, although with eternal complaint, a state of things that I found intolerable. I could not reconcile myself; I was filled with unrest; I questioned and criticised; I raged and rebelled and knew that in acceptance came a measure of peace, only I could not pay the price of such peace. Some uncontainable force spurred me on and on to where I knew not, nor to what end.
>
>   I accustomed myself to hunger and that tiredness which takes away all sense of feeling; only, I could not accept; I could not accustom myself to acceptance. I formed wild plans of escape.[76]

It may seem surprising that autobiographers with first-hand experience of urban poverty, and who self-identified as working-class for at least part of their lives, expressed similar anxieties surrounding the urban crowd to those of a socially aloof literary intelligentsia, who surveyed the urban working class from a distance. Whilst this is partly accounted for by the nature of the sources – many autobiographers joined the intelligentsia later in life, and were often aware from childhood that their intellectual curiosity set them apart from those around them – it also reveals an emotional complexity to anxious and misanthropic assessments of the urban poor. A sense of isolation and detachment from the 'mass' could function as an emotional coping mechanism for autobiographers unwilling or unable to face the reality of their lives. Often, misanthropic and pessimistic descriptions of urbanites were not simply manifestations of a facile and reactionary elitism. Adopting a blasé attitude to the urban poor, describing them in mechanical and dehumanising terms, and deriding their unthinking acceptance of the conditions of life could be emotionally insulating. It could preclude intense emotional suffering and anguish at the unrelenting miseries of urban poverty; comprehension of and empathy with the sheer scale of the sufferings of others was, at times, almost unbearable for autobiographers to contemplate. Autobiographers were often self-consciously aware of the emotional difficulties attendant on refusing to become emotionally calloused; to become hardened and resigned to urban deprivation. They suggest, both implicitly and explicitly, that anxiety surrounding working-class urban life was connected to a sense of hope and an attitude of vitality to life; an insistence that there was 'something more'.

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[76] Woodward, p.84.

Critical analysis of the writings of social commentators and novelists similarly reveals the emotional functions of a misanthropic disdain for the urban 'masses'. Carey has read this mix of high cultural anxiety and contempt as a specifically late-Victorian and Edwardian response to mass literacy. Yet, as his critics have noted, there is little new in this elite scorn for the 'mob'; intellectual disdain for the masses has a long history in Western thought.[77] What *is* new in the period, and what needs to be accounted for, is not that there is a pervasive misanthropy in the attitudes of intellectual elites towards the urban poor, but that there is not *just* misanthropy. Authors were rarely unequivocal about their dismissal of the 'masses'; the impulse to conceive of humanity in the aggregate was in constant tension with a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity and worth of each individual.

Highly emotionally acute responses to individual predicaments are common among those who studied the urban poor. Olive Schreiner, for example, wrote in a letter to the statistician Karl Pearson of her investigations into urban prostitution in terms of intense emotional trauma: 'sometimes when I have been walking Gray's Inn Road and seen one of those terrible old women that are so common there, the sense of agonised *oneness* with her that I have felt, that she was myself only under different circumstances, has stricken me almost mad.' For Schreiner, this visceral experience of empathy was a particularly gendered perspective, which contrasted with the more emotionally detached experience of male observers. She wrote to Pearson: 'yes, I knew you felt these things, but perhaps not in the way a woman can feel them. […] Do you think any man could feel so?' Yet Schreiner, too, argued that emotional engagement at the level of the individual did little to further efforts for social reform,

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[77] Hilton Kramer, for instance, argued that Carey's approach was 'historically myopic […] devoid of cultural memory' in ignoring eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prehistory of intellectual anxieties surrounding the crowd and mass culture, 'for example: Carlyle, Mill, Arnold, Ruskin, Newman, Bagehot, Morely, and sundry other Victorian eminences'. Reviewing *The Intellectuals and the Masses* in the *Independent,* Jonathan Keates wrote: 'why, for one thing, take 1880 as the terminus post quem? Artistic creativity, by its very nature, has always involved an otherness, a sense of alienation from the herd. Hasn't Carey listened to Horace's "Odi profanum vulgus", Chaucer's fling at the "fickle peple unstable and ever untrewe" or Shakespeare's pathological blasting, in play after play, of the "mutable, rank-scented many"? […] [And] it seems wilfully eccentric to omit any mention of either Ruskin or Matthew Arnold - both of whom are central, we might have thought, to the discourse'. Kramer, p.4; Jonathan Keates, 'Book Review, Nobs versus Mobs: *The Intellectuals and the Masses'*, *Independent,* 4th July 1992. For discussion of the (persistently anti-democratic) history of the idea of the crowd in Western intellectual thought, see McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: Plato to Canetti,* esp. pp.1-33.

ultimately concluding in her letter: 'it is not a case for crying out against individuals, or sexes, but simply for changing a whole system.' [78]

This awareness could often provoke genuine pathos at the disparity between the individual's essential significance, and the apparent smallness of the individual when weighed against the scale of mass society. Such ambivalence was intensified by the historically unprecedented growth of the size of cities, and of the corresponding growth in the scale of social problems: the vast size of cities seemed to demand solutions on a collective scale, yet theorising at a collective level could seem to contemporaries as careless of the integrity and value of each individual life. There is thus a sense of real emotional difficulty in late Victorian intellectual and literary thought: a struggle to conceptualise the relation between the individual and the collective in an ever-more complex social organisation. And there is, too, a sense of genuine ambivalence as to the status of empathy with the urban poor.

Whilst Carey has viewed the linguistic strategies employed by the literary intelligentsia to describe the urban masses as indicative solely of knee-jerk elitism and misanthropy, his treatment of high-cultural texts is often divorced from a consideration of their purposes and the contexts of their production. To take the example of Charles Masterman: as we have seen, Masterman's writing is characterised by linguistically inventive metaphors and formulations of humanity in the abstract, which evoke, time and again, the crushing psychological and social effects of modern urban life. The language is often dehumanising, and often misanthropic. Yet one of the primary purposes of his writings was to effect social change, and to protest conditions on behalf of the urban poor. His writing is dominated both by a conviction in the absolute necessity of social and political action, and a sense of powerlessness and paralysis in the face of the enormity of the task. Indeed, Masterman understood this ambivalence to be representative of his readership, writing rhetorically in *The Heart of the Empire:*

> "People," a careful observer has told us, "have become tired of the poor." Results seem so inadequate; the material is so stubborn and unpliant; it seems better after all to let things drift […] Age after age has passed, scheme after scheme has been tried, and in essence the problem remains as far from solution as ever. […] and the problem [of poverty] still remains in all its sordid, unimaginable vastness as insoluble as ever. […] Small wonder if, after the failure of all these sanguine schemes, those who

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[78] Olive Schreiner, 'Letter to Karl Pearson' 19th July 1885, in Olive Schreiner, *Letters,* vol.1: 1871-1899, ed. Richard Rive (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.116.

> introduced them turn away in disgust from a people so intractable, and refuse to disturb themselves longer with a problem apparently beyond human endeavour.[79]

For Masterman, the contemporary failure to address large-scale urban problems seems to have created both a sense of embattled injustice, and of impotent rage at the order of things. This is perhaps the context in which to understand his metaphoric formulation and re-formulation of urban problems, which reaches for ever-more extreme terms. There is perhaps a conscious and deliberate use of language to defamiliarise 'the way things are', in order to shock as a call to action, and to prick the reader's conscience in order to effect social change. There is also an explicit acknowledgment that indifference towards poverty – an attitude of disdain and disgust that proclaimed one as 'tired of the poor' – was not so much a product of reflexive elitism as of weariness: an inability to improve social conditions that shaded into apparent disinterest. A dismissive attitude emerges as a reflexive reaction to impotence in the face of social problems.

Of course, this is a socially privileged form of emotional struggle. Masterman's choice of tone is one of seemingly deliberate detachment: of blithe Victorian philanthropists having a go at the 'problem' of the poor, and returning to lives of insulated privilege when those first attempts fail. But there is a strange mix of emotional registers in the passage above, in which a kind of staunch imperial capitalist 'can-do' spirit (solutions to the existence of extreme social inequality reduced to entrepreneurial terms of 'results' and 'sanguine schemes', its raw material to be gauged for pliancy) is undercut by genuine fear. The brute reality of social problems is suddenly revealed in 'all its sordid, unimaginable vastness', and horror is immediately covered by disgust – which, in turn, ameliorates into indifference after the problem has been ignored. The terms, too, are deliberately ironic: Masterman ventriloquises a certain elite attitude towards the urban poor, as if they refused to let themselves be fixed. Yet Masterman was himself prone to this attitude, referring to the 'Burden of London' (perhaps analogous to the imperialist's 'White Man's Burden') that pressed itself upon social reformers.[80] This sense of 'burden' is key to understanding attitudes of misanthropy towards the urban poor in the period's novels and social commentary.

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[79] Masterman, 'Realities at Home', pp.5-6.
[80] See Masterman, 'the Burden of London'.

Indeed, misanthropy was often a response to the apparently insoluble scale of urban problems. Novelists such as Gissing were enormously sympathetic to individual miseries, yet shaded into pessimism and contempt when describing the poor as a whole.[81] Gissing could be intensely sensitive towards the almost intolerable acuteness of individual suffering (indeed, he had his own experience of urban poverty to draw upon), writing of *The Nether World*'s Clara Hewett, for instance: 'sometimes in the silence of night she suffered from a dreadful need of crying aloud, of uttering her anguish in a scream like that of insanity. She stifled it only by crushing her face into the pillow until the hysterical fit had passed, and she lay like one dead.'[82] Yet the *Nether World* is also dominated by descriptions of the poor as a whole that are infused with the extremities of horror and uncaring disgust; of revulsion from a superfluous, yet burdensome profusion of ugly and unclean bodies. A slum is envisaged as

> a street of squalid houses, swarming with yet more squalid children. On all the doorsteps sat little girls, themselves only just out of infancy, nursing or neglecting bald, red-eyed, doughy-limbed abortions in every stage of babyhood, hapless spawn of diseased humanity, born to embitter and brutalise yet further the lot of those who unwittingly gave them life.[83]

A common theme in slum novels is the tragedy of birth: that lives continue to be born in already overcrowded conditions, perpetuating and multiplying the struggle and misery of slum life. Similarly, whilst the bodies of the poor as a whole aroused disgust and revulsion, contemplation of the bodies of individual people provoked very different emotions. For Gissing, it could awaken feelings of social guilt: 'I cannot look at the hands of a toiling man or woman without feeling deeply wretched. To compare my own hands with them, shames me.'[84] There is a sense of cognitive dissonance between misanthropy born of an instinctive aesthetic response to the working classes as a whole, and a sympathetic response to

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[81] Gissing's first-hand experience of urban poverty no doubt informed his characterisation: the character arc of Sidney in the *Nether World*, for instance, closely mirrors that of working-class autobiographers, as he alternately resigns himself to acceptance of the social order at the expense of hope, and struggles against that acceptance.

[82] Gissing, *The Nether World,* p.86.

[83] Whilst much of the *Nether World* is permeated with this sense of disgust, Gissing also hints at the emotional difficulties attendant on empathising with the urban poor, amid the scale of human suffering, writing of a tenement block: 'pass by in the night, and strain imagination to picture the weltering mass of human weariness, of bestiality, of unmerited dolour, of hopeless hope, of crushed surrender.' William Greenslade indicates the extent to which Gissing's sense of disgust at the bodies of the poor was informed and magnified by anxieties about population growth, characterising the passage as 'Malthusian despair' at the 'random proliferation' of the urban poor.
Gissing, *The Nether World*, pp.129-30 and 273-4; William Greenslade, 'Fitness and the Fin de Siècle', in John Stokes (ed), *Fin de Siècle, Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the late Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992)*,* p.41.

[84] Jacob Korg (ed), *George Gissing's Commonplace Book* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), p.54. See also discussion of the passage in relation to Gissing's ambivalence in Carey, pp.116-7.

individual suffering. Disgust for the 'other' appears as an emotionally insulating position, which precludes intense feelings of shame when contemplating the urban 'masses' as comprised of millions of individuals who each feel their own suffering acutely.[85]

One response to this emotional conflict was to choose not to empathise: to adopt the kind of Nietzschean attitude expressed by Edwin Muir that 'pity was the deepest treachery to man's ultimate hope.' John Carey has written that 'dreaming of the extermination or sterilisation of the mass' was 'an imaginative refuge for early twentieth-century intellectuals.'[86] Carey gives little suggestion as to what this might be a refuge from, beyond a reflexive revulsion at the very existence of the 'masses', yet it is significant that many of those who advocated eugenics did so out of a sense that it was a humane response to the scale of urban problems amid rapid population growth. H. G. Wells, for example, expressed deep anxiety over urban overpopulation, writing that 'the extravagant swarm of new births' had been 'the essential disaster of the nineteenth century.'[87] Time and again, Wells repeats in his writings that to allow the population to run unchecked in the name of freedom is an irresponsible ideological position.[88] Sympathy with the poor is often envisaged as an essentially cowardly response: an apparent kindness that allows their suffering to perpetuate and proliferate with each generation. 'Pity' becomes conceptualised as a form of squeamishness that shies away from final solutions to the problem of poverty. In *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought,* Wells envisaged that in 'The New Republic' of the rational future, people 'will not be squeamish' about inflicting death upon the 'unfit', 'because they will have a fuller sense of the possibilities of life than we possess.' Whole swathes of the urban poor (those with mental disorders, hereditary diseases or bodily deformations, even incurable alcoholics) will be put to death "humanely", sedated with opiates to spare them needless suffering.[89]

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[85] Indeed, Martha Nussbaum argues in *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law,* that disgust for the 'other' is a projection of the internal sense of shame at the fact of human imperfection and vulnerability. For further discussion see Chapters One and Two.

[86] Carey, p.15.

[87] H. G. Wells, *Kipps* (1905; London: Fontana Collins, 1961), p.240.

[88] Wells observed in *A Modern Utopia,* for instance that 'from the view of human comfort and happiness, the increase of population that occurs at each advance in human security is the greatest evil of life'. H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia,* p.124.

[89] See also discussion of eugenics in Wells' thought in Martin Gardner, 'Introduction' in H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (1902; New York: Dover, 1999), pp.x-xii.

Anticipations saw Wells at his most vituperatively misanthropic, anti-democratic, racist and eugenicist. Whilst Wells modified his position in subsequent writings (in *A Modern Utopia,* for example, Wells' utopians prescribe sterilisation but not killing), he continued to advocate eugenics as a means of improving social conditions, under the rationale that apparent cruelty was a humane solution (perversely, the *only* humane solution) that would ultimately ameliorate the scale of human suffering. Yet Wells was also intensely sensitive towards the daily sufferings of ordinary people. His sympathy for the young, especially, provoked some of the most compassionate insights in his writing. In *The World of William Clissold,* for example, Wells railed against the failures of the nineteenth century, in which gains in productivity had been 'absorbed by blind breeding', yet he also observed that 'going to work is a misery and a tragedy for the great multitude of boys and girls who have to face it. Suddenly they see their lives plainly defined as limited and inferior. It is a humiliation so great that they cannot even express the hidden bitterness of their souls. But it is there.'[90] Wells exemplifies a basic emotional difficulty that presented itself to intellectual and literary observers of urban life: population growth placed an enormous strain upon the tension between an awareness of human potentiality – of the essential human worth and significance of each and every person – and the need for collective and systematic action if urban problems were to be solved. There is a real sense of tension between the humanistic impulse to assert the importance of human potentiality; to decry urban conditions that crushed human potential and caused widespread suffering, and an inability to theorise solutions that did not themselves subordinate individual freedom to the collective needs of society.[91] The scale of urban problems seemed to render incompatible the moral responsibility of human sympathy, and the social responsibility to theorise solutions on at a collective level. Yet the ideological ambivalence of many social commentators was also influenced by a complex mixture of intensely personal emotions. A volatile blend of sympathy, pity, disgust and shame intermixed in a variety of combinations when authors contemplated the relationship between the urban 'masses', the individuals of which the 'mass' was comprised, and themselves. Empathy could appear as an unstable emotional and ideological position: authors such as Wells and Gissing found empathy with the suffering of others on a seemingly ever-increasing scale intensely difficult to contemplate. Disgust, an emotionally detached attitude towards the

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[90] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 141.

[91] Indeed, Lynne Hapgood writes of the emotional implications of Wells' tendency to theorise collective solutions: 'Unintentionally, he nurtured his own disillusion by his determination to search for an overarching idea that would resolve society's contradictions, and his growing sense, as a consequence, that society had run out of control. […] The individual is marginalised or overwhelmed by social forces'. Hapgood, p.241.

lives of others, and 'getting rid of people' (in Carey's terminology) could emerge as a form of emotional insulation that carried with it both the virtues and consolations of ideological consistency.[92]

The Lonely Crowd?

Late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual observers, from social theorists to romantic critics and state-of-the-nation novelists, perceived modern urban life to be characterised by isolation, loneliness, rootlessness, social atomisation, alienation, and anomie. Laissez-faire industrialism was seen to have uprooted individuals both physically and psychologically, removing individuals from rural communities and depositing them into the anonymity of the urban crowd.[93] Jonathan Rose has written perceptively of the Edwardian temperament that 'spiritual rootlessness was aggravated by physical loneliness'.[94] The emotional resonance of personal loneliness in the presence of so many other lives provided a particularly evocative means of conceptualising the human condition in the modern city. For social commentators and novelists, the trope of the breakdown of romantic love in mass society epitomised the disintegrating tendencies of the age, symbolising the putative social and emotional effects of urbanisation in which individuals failed to connect with one another. Amongst others, H. G. Wells, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, William Morris and Edward Carpenter viewed pathological attitudes to love and sex as a bellwether for the diseased modern condition.

In Wells' *Tono-Bungay,* for instance, love becomes a casualty of the modern industrial city, symptomatic of social disintegration. Whilst, in the 'Bladesover' model of English life epitomised by the country house and dependent village, marriage was a 'public function with

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[92] Carey, ch.6, 'H. G. Wells Getting Rid of People', pp.118-134.

[93] Andrew Lees has written of romantic social critics: 'the sense of gloomy foreboding and alienation became especially pronounced as the romantic poets gave voice to the misery they observed and the loneliness they felt while walking among their fellow urbanites. […] This feeling that proximity to large numbers of other human beings entailed personal isolation from them was to recur more and more frequently as cities themselves grew in size and complexity.' Lees, p.9.
Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sociologists, too, created analytical categories with which to characterise the age as one of loss of individuality, and urban loneliness, isolation, rootlessness and atomisation – from Durkheim's *anomie* to Weberian disenchantment and Tönnies' *gesellschaft.* See Lees, pp.163 and 171-2; Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (eds), *The Imagined Past: history and nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.6-7.

[94] Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919,* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), p.49.

a public significance', George's marriage to Marion in London becomes an irrelevant farce. He observes of the wedding procession:

> Under the stress of tradition we were all of us trying in the fermenting chaos of London to carry out the marriage ceremonies of a Bladesover tenant or one of the chubby middling sort of people in some dependent country town. […] But in London there are no neighbours, nobody knows, nobody cares […] The irrelevant clatter and tumult gave us a queer flavour of indecency to this public coming-together of lovers. We seemed to have obtruded ourselves shamelessly.[95]

For George, 'Love, like everything else in this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live, is a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connexions.' Sex is a 'mighty passion, that our aimless civilisation has fettered and maimed and sterilised and debased'.[96] The tone is similar to Forster's call in *Howards End* to 'only connect': atomisation at a social level corresponds to the detachment at a psychological level between the life of the mind and the life of the body, held to be typical of the human condition in modernity. The loneliness of modern urban life is seen to entail both alienation from others, and estrangement from oneself. Edward Carpenter wrote similarly of the psychological fragmentation that was entailed in modern urban life. For Carpenter, the fate of sex in contemporary society (emotionally repressed, performed in dusty, stuffily-upholstered interiors cut off from organic connection to the earth and the air) was a measure of urban artificiality and isolation.[97] Writing of Gissing's *The Nether World,* Stephen Gill observes of the absence of love in late Victorian fiction that it represents

> the clearest indication of the extremity of vision […] for it [love] has always been the transhistorical power to which artists appeal as the one element in life which surmounts social and economic determinism […] The couple is not a nostrum for society's ills, but a locus of values, and hopes, and potentialities which even the worst of environmental circumstances cannot suppress.[98]

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[95] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* (Penguin), pp.181-2

[96] Wells, *Tono-Bungay,* (Penguin), pp.372-3.

[97] Carpenter, for example, wrote that 'sexual embraces […] themselves seldom receive the benison of Dame Nature, in whose presence alone, under the burning sun or the high canopy of the stars and surrounded by the fragrant atmosphere, their meaning can be fully understood: but take place in stuffy dens of dirty upholstery and are associated with all unbeautiful things.' Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age: A Series of Papers on the Relations of the Sexes* (1896; New York and London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1911), p.22.
In Morris' *News from Nowhere,* too, the fulfilment of sexual desire becomes a metaphor for the whole complex of human fulfillments that have been stifled amid life in the modern industrial city. See Clive Wilmer, 'Introduction', in Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings,* p.xxvii.

[98] Stephen Gill, 'Introduction', in Gissing, *The Nether World,* p.xvii.

That love was perceived to have ceased to serve as a redemptive force amid the logic of industrialism was thus intended to indict modern urban life in the strongest possible terms: suggestive of a society whose inhabitants led lives of total isolation, without the prospect or hope of human connection.

These anxieties of literary and intellectual elites surrounding the romantic lives of ordinary urbanites, and their alienation from forms of community, were based more upon (emotionally-charged) assumptions about the consequences of social change than upon dispassionate social observation. The accounts of working-class autobiographers, however, provide a much more equivocal picture. Many autobiographers refute intellectual assertions of a sense of anomie and rootlessness in urban life: writers frequently emphasize a strong sense of community in slums and tenements, and mutual aid amongst their neighbours. The sense of community amongst the urban working class could provide an emotional compensation for material privations: Grace Foakes wrote of her childhood in an East End slum that 'they were happy days in that close-knit community. The feeling of belonging outclassed everything else. There was poverty, disease, dirt and ignorance, and yet to feel one belonged outweighed all else.'[99] Hymie Fagan, whose parents moved to a predominantly Jewish area of the East End to escape the Russian pogroms, wrote that 'as far as our surroundings were concerned we could have been living in Eastern Europe', so strong was the sense of local community; 'it made them feel a sense of togetherness in a foreign land'.[100] Indeed, the deeply felt need to belong to a community could eclipse the appeal of social mobility. Walter Southgate, also writing of his childhood in an East End tenement, reflected upon why his parents made no apparent attempt to move to the suburbs:

> The community spirit would be gone in any new effort to live aloof behind the suburban garden hedges, boarded fences and locked doors. My parents would have felt like fish out of water; the quietness, privacy and lack of neighbourliness would have overwhelmed them and made them miserable. Gone would be the friendly chats at the street door on a summer evening, the mutual help when in need, the bustling street market stalls and the atmosphere of the public house.[101]

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[99] Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1974), p.56.
[100] Hymie Fagan, *An Autobiography,* TS, 2:261, Burnett Archive, p.7.
[101] Walter Southgate, *That's the Way it Was: A Working Class Autobiography, 1890-1950* (Oxted, Surrey: New Clarion Press, 1982), pp.100-1.

The closeness of slum communities was not always viewed in such an unequivocally positive light: autobiographers could find life in such close conditions stifling, even stultifying. V. W. Garratt lamented his growing up in the confines of a working-class community in Birmingham: 'life could not be lived unto itself in those small communities.' Remembering scenes of Mafficking in the city as a child, he wrote that

> It is not surprising that in crowded areas where life is stifled into uniformity, the people rush to every excuse for an outburst of emotion. Individual development has little chance in hovels where all conversation can be heard by the next-door neighbour and local opinion sits in judgment on every movement. I recall the whispering and the tittle-tattle of our own home and how the natural inclinations of people were continually checked.[102]

Nonetheless, such accounts present a revealing contrast to the concerns of intellectuals that individuality could run unchecked amid the anonymity of the modern city, and their nostalgia for the moral sanctions imposed upon behaviour in the rural village community. Urban working-class observers described their communities in much the same language that social commentators reserved for nostalgic evocations of traditional forms of social order felt to be lost in an age of urbanisation and industrialisation.

Yet the autobiographies of intellectually ambitious autodidacts, in particular, express deep anxieties about their sense of loneliness and psychological isolation. For some authors, their sense of personal isolation and loneliness in the presence of so many other people had particular emotional resonance. W. N. P. Barbellion, living in London as a young man, yet suffering from multiple sclerosis and often confined to his lodgings, wrote that 'this celestial isolation will send me out of my mind.' But even when able to wander about the streets of London, Barbellion described his 'gnawing, rancorous discontent to be seeing people everywhere in London – millions of them – and then realise my own ridiculously circumscribed knowledge of them.'[103] For Barbellion, a sense of loneliness amid the urban crowd could produce feelings of derealisation and depersonalisation, both of which are common defensive responses to chronic anxiety. Barbellion conveys a hallucinogenic sense of the unreality of experience in the city: 'London bewilders me. At times it is a phantasmagoria, an opium dream out of De Quincey.' He likened the experience of social isolation to an out-of-body experience:

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[102] V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street,* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939), p.64.
[103] Barbellion, pp.153 and 135.

> I began to visualise my lamentable situation, and rose above it as I did so. I staged it before my mind's eye and observed myself as hero of the plot. I saw myself sitting in a dirty armchair in a dirty house in a dirty London street, with the landlady's dirty daughter below-stairs singing, 'Little Grey Home in the West', my head obscured in a cloud of depression…[104]

Similarly, Edwin Muir wrote of the peak of his anxiety and depression that 'I felt that I had gone far away from myself; I could see myself as from a distance, a pallid, ill-nourished, vulnerable young man in a world bursting with dangerous energy.'[105] Such experiences were perhaps emotional coping mechanisms for managing and regulating anxiety states. Barbellion wrote that his disembodied perspective brought him emotional relief: 'acute mental pain turned into merely aesthetic malaise.'[106]

In the main, the accounts of working-class autobiographers present a much more optimistic picture of the human condition in mass urban life than did novelists, social theorists and social commentators. Yet they also experienced and represented urban society from fundamentally different perspectives. Whilst autobiographers rarely observed their surroundings from the imaginatively elevated perspectives of Muir and Barbellion, the perspective of high cultural writings was generally an olympian one: urban society observed from above and afar. In part, this way of seeing itself predisposed intellectual and literary observers to anxious assessments of the fate of individuality in mass society: human significance seemingly shrank in proportion to intellectual and imaginative distance. As individual difference became 'merged in the aggregate', and cosmopolitan diversity blended into a 'universal grey', the resultant 'mass' of ordinary people appeared to the observer as faceless and undifferentiated beings, whose apparent uniformity seemed at once unworthy of aesthetic attention or humanistic sympathy, and a threatening and unknowable crowd.

But this view from above was also a necessary perspective for those who sought to diagnose the emotional condition of England in order to pursue social reform, and who sought to highlight the vast scale of human suffering and unhappiness in the modern industrial city as a call to social action. In this sense, it is deeply significant that many observers who emphasised the essential human worth of each individual in mass society –

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[104] Barbellion, pp.126 and 149.
[105] Muir, *The Story and the Fable,* p.172.
[106] Barbellion, p.149.

who expressed feelings of shame and guilt at the extent of social inequality, and who voiced the urgency of social reform – were also prone to contemptuous and misanthropic assessments of humanity in the aggregate. Whilst partly age-old intellectual snobbery, this dismissive attitude was itself, in no small part, an emotionally insulating reflex: a coping mechanism for feelings of overwhelming paralysis in the face of the scale of social problems.

In turn, it is indicative of a real emotional and intellectual difficulty in conceptualising the individual in the modern city; an intellectual difficulty to think 'big' (to theorise solutions on the scale at which the modern city demanded) that was matched by a corresponding emotional and aesthetic aversion to the kind of human scale of big cities. Mass urbanisation, coupled with population growth, magnified and placed a historically unprecedented strain upon human dilemmas that have a long history in Western intellectual thought: the tension between the drive to pursue pleasure and the urge to take comfort from suffering; the tension between the rational and the animal (and the bestial), and the fear, too, that man was essentially a machine. There is also a tension of a more strictly emotional nature: that of the relationship between hope and anxiety. Across a wide range of discourses, contemporaries suggested, both implicitly and explicitly, that deep anxiety about the scale of human suffering in urban life was predicated upon hopes for a more humane future; unequivocal cultural pessimism about human worth in mass society relieved social observers of the responsibility to engage empathically with the lived realities of urban poverty and social inequality.

Chapter Six – 'The Cleansing of England': Pastoralism, Rural Nostalgia and the Pursuit of Beauty

The final chapter examines rural nostalgia and pastoralism in relation to emotional responses to the modern city. Nostalgia for the rural past, and attempts to re-connect with nature, reflected the tangible and physical concerns of contemporaries surrounding urban pollution and suburban sprawl, but they also reveal emotional attitudes to the city, and deep-seated anxieties about the human condition that became magnified amid historically unprecedented urban and demographic growth. The chapter considers the diverse, though interrelated, dimensions of nostalgia in late Victorian and Edwardian culture: nostalgia for the rural past could be both an escapist fantasy reflecting contemporary unease over urban life, and a 'restitutive link' assuaging anxiety over the present by rooting it in a stable past. Nostalgia, too, could appeal to a sense of the loss of a unified childhood mindworld, which became mapped onto the urbanising landscape and appeared to many contemporaries as suggestive of the emotional and psychological fragmentation of modernity.[1] Indeed, nostalgia for the natural world was often identified with the extra-sensory intensity of childlike perception. Conversely, sensory perception of the urban environment was often represented in terms of disgust and revulsion; the extremities of which conveyed a sense of bodily shame, corruption and the loss of human innocence, and reflected anxieties about pollution and cleanliness.

An emotional and sensorial approach draws attention to the ways in which late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes to cities were informed by structures of feeling, in which reactions to the urban environment were literally embodied within individuals.[2] The shared vocabulary of emotional and sensory perception – evident, at the most basic level, of the dual meaning of words such as 'feeling' and 'touched' – reveals the conceptual slippage between forms of

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[1] Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw, 'The Dimensions of Nostalgia', in Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (eds), The *imagined past: history and nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.4-5.

[2] I draw here on Michael Kimmel's concept of the 'retrojection' of metaphor: a process by which metaphors, symbols and images 'come to be felt inside the body. For further discussion, see Chapter One, 'Introduction'. Michael Kimmel, 'Properties of Cultural Embodiment: Lessons from the Anthropology of the Body', in Roselyn M. Frank, Rene Dirven, Tom Ziemke, and Enrique Bernardez (eds), *Body, Language and Mind,* vol.2, *Sociocultural Situatedness* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), pp.99-101.
Moreover, historians of the senses emphasise that sense perception itself is culturally and historically conditioned: the ways in which we use our senses, and the ways we create, order and understand the sensory world, are shaped by social values and conventions. See, for example, David Howes (ed), *Empire of the Senses: the Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), pp.2-11.

contact and forms of emotion. As Nicolas Kenny writes of the 'feel' of the city, 'bodily practices that appear inconsequential on the surface, the everyday sights, smells, and sounds of the industrial city reveal unsuspected texture to urban dwellers' relationship with the charged environment of urban modernity.' Close attention to the ways in which authors described their bodily encounters with urban space thus reveals the 'corporeal experiences of modernity.'[3]

The chapter also explores the contemporary belief that the modern city atrophied the human spirit and blunted men's finer sensibilities, and that only through a return to nature could humanity recover a sense of spirituality. In particular, it contrasts the language of urban sense perception in novels, social commentary and working-class autobiographical writing to the language in which authors represented their experience of the countryside. The chapter suggests that intersensorial and synaesthetic metaphors that conveyed the experience of nature reveal the deeply-felt need for an aestheticised or artistic consciousness, in which experience of the transcendent or sublime could recover a sense of meaning felt to be lost in modernity, by physically re-connecting individuals to the natural landscape. Yet it also argues that, whilst contemporaries indicted the modern urban landscape for its ugliness and indifference to the essential human need for beauty, there was a widespread recognition that city was also the site of imaginative resources which could compensate for the loss of access to the beauty and inspirations of nature. Urban museums, art galleries, libraries and parks provided emotional compensations for the aesthetic limitations of urban life, and countered romantic anxieties surrounding the deadening of aesthetic sensibility in the industrial city.

The Dimensions of late Victorian and Edwardian Nostalgia

Nostalgia for the rural past could simply serve as a manifestation of anxiety over urbanisation, acting as an 'emotional refuge' from an instinctive and reflexive anti-urbanism.[4] For Jan Marsh, late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century nostalgia was prompted by the depopulation of the countryside and the visible decline of rural life: 'with the traditional countryside of England apparently disappearing forever, pastoral attitudes were reasserted

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[3] Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiences of Urban Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp.4-14.

[4] For example, Chase and Shaw (eds), and Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880-1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982).

with intensity.'[5] Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw write that 'the deep sense of connection with the past one might feel can be simply a unilateral projection of our present anxieties and fantasies.'[6] This interpretation of nostalgia as a one-dimensional symptom of contemporary malaise has tended to predominate in analyses of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural nostalgia.[7] In this reading, contemporaries who feared or resented aspects of urban life simply took refuge in a backwards-looking nostalgia for an idealised Olde England and an imagined Golden Age of social harmony; rural nostalgia thus serves as a cultural explanation for the putative anti-industrial and anti-modern tendencies of English culture. To be sure, late Victorian and Edwardian culture abounded in imaginative retreats into the pre-modern rural past (to name just a few: Arts-and-Crafts medievalism, the folk song revival, Edwardian 'simple-lifers', back-to-the-land movements). Yet imaginative literature and art that celebrated the pleasures of nature have often been taken to indicate the pervasiveness of anti-urbanism in contemporary society; as Peter Mandler writes, this view of the relationship between cultural production and social attitudes ignores the possibility that

> imaginative literature harping on the beauties of the countryside […] might well be seen to have therapeutic benefits, fantasy value, in reassuring a complacently urban and commercial people that they could still enjoy vicariously the rural virtues *without* the poverty, loneliness, ill health and technological backwardness that afflicted other peoples who had to experience rural life in the phenomenal world. How many readers of *Wind in the Willows* really wanted to do without their motor cars?[8]

In this sense, rural nostalgia served as a form of imaginative escapism that compensated for aspects of life felt to be lost in an age of urbanisation and industrialisation, thus enabling a cultural climate broadly conducive to modernisation. Similarly, George Behlmer and Fred Leventhal argue that nostalgia functioned as a 'restitutive link', reassuring individuals that continuity existed between former and current conditions, and functioning as an enabling

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[5] Marsh, p.4.

[6] Chase and Shaw, p.4.

[7] For example, Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (London: Penguin, 1992). See also historiographical discussion in Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940), *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Sixth Series, Vol 7 (1997), pp.155-7.

[8] Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History,* 1 (1), 2004, p.106. David Lowenthal similarly notes that nostalgists desire to "get out" of modernity, without leaving it altogether; 'Nor does nostalgia necessarily connote despairing rejection of the present. Few admirers of the past would actually choose to return to it – nostalgia expresses longings for times that are safely, rather than sadly, beyond recall.' David Lowenthal, 'Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't', in Chase and Shaw, p.28.

strategy for coping with change, loss and anomie.[9] For Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, this is the context in which to understand the 'invention of traditions' such as the folk song revival and idealisations of village life, which 'often served a compensatory purpose by creating continuities between the past and the 'modern' present. […] [They] were at least in part motivated by a desire to forge connections between the present and imagined pasts.'[10] This is not to overturn the understanding that nostalgia was a projection of anxieties about the consequences of urbanisation, but to suggest that it was a constructive response to that anxiety, in which the imaginative work of culture was substituted in lieu of the actual influence of the experience of nature.

Yet there is a further dimension of nostalgia: one that resonated with particular significance in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Chase and Shaw note that nostalgia is a more manifold and various phenomenon than is often assumed; they draw a distinction between nostalgia in the historical sense, in which the present is 'unfavourably contrasted with some putative property found in the past', and a more personal sense of nostalgia – a longing for 'the undivided consciousness of childhood'.[11] Indeed, nostalgia for childhood was as pervasive in the Edwardian period as was nostalgia for nature. For Jonathan Rose, the Edwardian retreat into childhood represented 'an attempt to rejuvenate – or escape from – civilisation'. Cultural phenomena as diverse as the pastoral children's literature of Kenneth Grahame and Edith Nesbit, the utopian 'storybook medievalism' of Morris' *News from*

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[9] George K. Behlmer, 'Introduction', in George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (eds) *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia and Identity in Modern British Culture,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp.7-8.

[10] Bernhard Rieger and Martin Daunton, 'Introduction', in Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II,* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001, p.5.

[11] Chase and Shaw write of this ahistorical aspect of nostalgia that 'perhaps as a species we are given to nostalgia, for each adult carries the memory of an age when the experience of time was different. Following the work of Heinrich Schutz, we propose a distinction between public time and the subjective experience of time. […] While adults experience both kinds of time it is plausible to suggest that small children live in only one […] the undivided consciousness of childhood.' Nostalgia is thus understood as the adult's longing for the child's freedom from the anxieties of fragmentation. Chase and Shaw, pp.4-5.
David Lowenthal notes, too, of this yearning for unification that nostalgists 'mainly envisage a time when folk did not feel fragmented, when doubt was either absent or patent, when thought fused with action, when aspiration achieved consummation, when life was wholehearted; in short, a past that was unified and comprehensible, unlike the incoherent and divided present.' In this sense, there is an ahistorical aspect to nostalgia: 'what we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were; but for the condition of *having been*, with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present.' Nostalgia is similarly understood as a yearning to be free from anxiety. David Lowenthal, 'Nostalgia tells it like it wasn't', in Chase and Shaw, p.29.

Nowhere, and Post-Impressionism, are viewed alike as attempts to escape the 'cul-de-sac' of modern urban civilisation through the 'untrained' and 'primitive' vision of the child.[12]

This aspect of nostalgia as a yearning to retreat into a unified childhood mind-world seems to relate, too, to contemporary debates about the effects of urbanisation and modernisation upon human consciousness. Social theorists such as Durkheim and Tönnies believed the modern city to have uprooted people from community and tradition, resulting in the modern fragmentation of consciousness and the loss of a unified mind-world held to be typical of traditional communities and 'primitive' societies.[13] In *Civilisation: its cause and cure,* Edward Carpenter wrote in similar terms 'that a great number of races in advancing towards Civilisation were conscious at some point or other of having lost a primitive condition of ease and contentment[.]' For Carpenter, nostalgia for a unified mind-world was the expression of a kind of collective unconscious: 'That each human soul, however, hears within itself some kind of reminiscence of a more harmonious and perfect state of being, which it has at some time experienced, seems to me a conclusion difficult to avoid.'[14] In this sense, there are correspondences between late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings about nostalgia for childhood, and anthropological reflections on the relationship between consciousness and social organisation. The transition from childhood to adult consciousness in an urbanising age recapitulated ideas surrounding the historical experience of modernisation, in which undivided consciousness and unity with nature were substituted by modern fragmentation and the dissociation of consciousness from the natural environment.

Moreover, many late nineteenth- and early twentieth century cultural commentators identified the experience of nature with the unselfconscious intensity and simplicity of childlike perception. Chase and Shaw write of William Morris, for instance, that his nostalgia was a response to the coarsening of sensibility in adulthood, and a consequent inability to fully appreciate nature: 'in William Morris we find another aspect of childhood poignantly absent from the mentality of the adult. To him the natural world had a sharpness and intensity that was lost, or at least rare in the adult.'[15] Lynne Hapgood writes similarly of Richard

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[12] Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp.178-88. Indeed, Morris envisaged his utopia as a 'second childhood' for mankind. As Rose writes: 'there is no longer any distinction between work and play, and manufactured articles are called "toys".' Rose, p.187.
[13] Chase and Shaw, p.7.
[14] Edward Carpenter, 'Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays* (1889; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), pp.27-8.
[15] Chase and Shaw, p.5.

Jefferies' nature writing that the English countryside provided an 'objective correlative' to the intensity and happiness of his unreflective childhood mentality; 'with Wordsworth, he lament[ed] the loss of the "visionary gleam" and the perceived failure of manhood to fulfill the promise of boyhood's ideal state.' [16] For Harvey Rolfe in George Gissing's *The Whirlpool*, too, a walk in the countryside of his boyhood evokes pangs of the loss of sensory intensity in adulthood:

> One day, as he followed the windings of a sluggish stream, he saw flowers of arrowhead, white flowers with crimson centre, floating by the bank, and remembered that he had once plucked them here when on a walk with his father, who had held him the while, lest he should stretch too far and fall in. To reach them now, he lay down upon the grassy bank; and in that moment there returned to him, with exquisite vividness, the mind, the senses, of childhood; once more he knew the child's pleasure in contact with earth, and his hand grasped hard at the sweet-smelling turf as though to keep a hold upon the past thus fleetingly recovered.[17]

Whilst, for Gissing's Harvey Rolfe, such experiences were largely lost in adulthood, for the protagonist of Elizabeth von Arnim's garden romance, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden,* the experience of nature provokes the rediscovery of her childhood emotional and imaginative landscape. The rediscovery of childhood enables adult self-discovery: 'I don't know what smell of wet earth or rotting leaves brought back my childhood with a rush […] Shall I ever forget that day? It was the beginning of my real life, my coming of age as it were'.[18] (Indeed, Barbara Gates has suggested that, in contrast to male nature-writers such as Jefferies, whose love of nature was elided with nostalgia for the vanished beauty of the rural past, women writers such as von Arnim reinterpreted nature and the rural world through the

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[16] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The suburbs in fiction and culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, p.67.

[17] Whilst experience of nature provokes a yearning ache for the uncomplicated happiness of childhood, Harvey regains a measure of contentment in the realisation that he might experience the pleasures of nature vicariously through his son: 'then came a thought of joy. The keen sensations which he himself had lost were his child's inheritance. Somewhere in the fields, this summer morning, Hughie was delighting in the scent, the touch of earth, young amid a world where all was new.' George Gissing, *The Whirlpool,* (1897; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), p.229.
A similar sense of nostalgia for the child's experience of nature can be found in D. H. Lawrence's *The White Peacock.* For example: '"I love beechnuts," she said, "but they make me long for my childhood again till I could almost cry out. To go out for beechnuts before breakfast; to thread them for necklaces before supper; – to be the envy of the others at school the next day! There was as much pleasure in a beech necklace then, as there is in the whole autumn now – and no sadness! There are no more unmixed joys after you have grown up."' D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock* (1911; London, Penguin, 1987), p.118.

[18] Elizabeth von Arnim, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898; London: Virago, 1985), p.7.

lens of the present, and were more 'involved in the business of describing, discussing, and theorising beauty *per se.*'[19])

Hapgood writes perceptively of nostalgia in the poet Edward Thomas' only novel, *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913), that 'childhood memories [...] create a landscape in which everything afterwards is located and by which everything is measured'. For Hapgood, Thomas 'traces the workings of the child's imagination and the way in which he internalises the external landscape as an enduring mental and emotional landscape.'[20] She sees this process, in which the external world of childhood experience becomes internalised as an enduring psychological landscape, as part of the imaginative power of the Edwardian children's stories of Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, Rudyard Kipling and E.S. Nesbit.

Yet in this respect, there is a correspondence between nostalgia in the historical sense (for the reputed happiness of the rural past) and this ahistorical, personal sense of nostalgia for the intensity and 'completeness' of childlike perception – which perhaps rendered contemporary nostalgia particularly acute. In remembering their childhoods, authors often reached not only for an inaccessible childhood mindworld, but for childhood memories set in physical environments that had in actuality been destroyed by urban growth and suburban sprawl. There is thus a double sense of loss for authors who were never able to return to childhood landscapes and (re-)experience them as adults. In his semi-autobiographical novel, *The New Machiavelli,* for example, H. G. Wells recounted how he watched his childhood home of Bromley – or Bromstead in the novel – being ruined.

> All my childish memories are of digging and wheeling, of woods invaded by building, roads gashed open and littered [...] hedges broken down and replaced by planks, of wheelbarrows and builders' sheds, of rivulets overtaken and swallowed up by drain-pipes [...] The Ravensbrook of my earlier memories was a beautiful stream. It came into my world out of a mysterious Beyond, out of a garden [...] And after I was eleven, and before we left Bromstead, all the delight and beauty of it was destroyed.[21]

Wells was, in many respects, fiercely opposed to the romanticised idealisation of rural Olde England, not least because such nostalgia failed to address aspects of the urban present and future. Yet his writings are infused with anger at the senselessness of unregulated jerry-

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[19] Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p.197.
[20] Hapgood, p.82.
[21] H. G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli,* (1911; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 37.

building that permanently destroyed the beauty of the English countryside in favour of shabby suburban dwellings. In an age of unprecedented urban expansion, his experience of watching his semi-rural childhood home engulfed by suburban sprawl was typical. This is key to understanding the historical specificities of late Victorian and Edwardian nostalgia: it is important to emphasise that, for many contemporaries, rural nostalgia was not just a yearning for an imagined past, or for the *idea* of England or the *idea* of the countryside. Often, expressions of the contemporary sense of rootlessness were not just a theoretical apparatus based on the alleged cohesion of peasant communities. These ideas became intermixed with intensely personal emotions and experiences of growing up in landscapes that were no longer physically there. And often, in turn, the experience of childhood within these disappearing landscapes (characterised by undivided consciousness, sensory intensity and unmixed happiness) became identified with the lost landscapes themselves.

There is, too, a sense of the instability of the meaning of landscape. Many contemporary observers expressed the urge to 'know' England on intimate terms as a stable thing, and felt a deep sense of loss that this mode of knowledge was no longer possible amid an urbanising landscape. In the rural imaginary, there is an emphasis on the significance of the particularities of the natural landscape, in which the landmarks and features of localities become both a way of knowing and a repository of historical memory. In *The Whirlpool,* for instance, Harvey yearns to escape the fluidity and anxiety of life in London: 'I felt a huge longing to give the rest of my life to some little bit of England, a county, or even a town, and exhaust the possibilities of knowledge within those limits […] learning by heart every stone of the old town.'[22] Early twentieth-century literature abounds with important trees that mark the significance of place, from Groby Great Tree in *Parade's End* to the Wych Elm at *Howards End.* Forster wrote of the latter: 'the importance of the predictable variety of the seasons, and the importance of the tree bearing eternal witness to it'; there is a sense of completeness in the changing rhythms of natural life, underpinned by the solidity of natural landmarks.[23] Forster wrote in terms of the uncomplicated sufficiency of sensuous experience of nature as a form of knowledge:

> The present flowed by them like a stream. The tree rustled. It had made music before they were born, and would continue after their deaths, but its song was of the

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[22] Gissing, *The Whirlpool,* p.226.
[23] E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, (1910; London: Penguin, 1953), p.312.

moment. The moment had passed. The tree rustled again. Their senses were sharpened, and they seemed to apprehend life. Life passed. The tree rustled again.[24]

This desire for the sensuous experience of natural harmony – the need to touch and feel tangible realities – pervades late Victorian and Edwardian culture. Novelists and social commentators alike emphasised the psychic importance of physically feeling these rhythms of natural life; finding a sense of meaningfulness in the porous borderline between feeling as a form of contact, and feeling as a form of emotion.

Pollution and Cleanliness

   The following section investigates attitudes towards pollution and cleanliness in the modern city, and suggests that rural nostalgia and pastoralism were connected to ideals of cleanliness that were felt to be threatened in the modern city; ideals that both reflected the concrete realities of urban life and were deeply emotional. It considers perspectives from the history of the senses in particular, in relation to ideals of rural cleanliness that were contrasted against urban pollution. Of course, issues such as pollution and sanitation were concrete problems posing all-too-real dangers to urban inhabitants, and thus were rightly addressed by urban critics who sought to prevent the destruction of England's countryside. But the writings of urban critics reveal an emotional dimension beyond such practical concerns: visible, for example, in Morris' 'dream of London' in *The Earthly Paradise*, 'small, and white, and clean.' In prose, Morris called for 'the cleansing of England', writing of the need to transform the nation 'from the grimy back yard of a workshop into a garden'.[25] In the same vein, Edward Carpenter wrote of his hopes for his small patch of land at Millthorpe: 'just to try and keep at least one little spot of earth clean'. Forster wrote in tribute to Carpenter: 'the two things he admired most on earth were manual labour and fresh air and he dreamed like William Morris that civilisation would be cured by their union.'[26] Through such sources, one is left with the impression that the pastoral impulse envisaged the modern industrial city as

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[24] Forster, p.293.
[25] Marsh, p.13
[26] Marsh, pp.18 and 22.

overlaying humanity with a polluting film that suffocated the finer elements of human nature; something dirty that needed to be washed off humanity through a return to the land.[27]

The tactility of urban anxieties is pervasive in contemporary thought. The urban environment is characterised by a grubby sense of tactility – the dirt, dust, soot, and so on. Urban anxieties were conveyed in terms of repulsion from the feel of the city, illuminating the conceptual slippage between processes of touching and feeling: the fault line between feeling as a form of contact and a form of emotion. In fiction, descriptions of urban filth often served as metaphor for the human condition in the industrial city. In Gissing's *The Nether World,* the all-pervading grime of slum life conveys a sense of the inescapability of urban poverty. Dirt cannot be kept at bay, and permeates into the bodies of the poor: 'the walls stood in a perpetual black sweat; a mouldy reek came from the open doorways; the beings that passed in and out seemed soaked with grimy moisture, puffed into distortions, hung about with rotting garments.'[28] Throughout Gissing's fiction, urban anxieties are conveyed in terms of disgust and revulsion from the unpleasant feel of the city: pavements are 'over-smeared with sticky mud'; rain-soaked roads are a 'steaming splash-bath' under the 'sooty spittle of a London sky'; trains travel 'through sooty gloom, under or above ground.'[29] In imaginative literature and social commentary alike, the air of the city itself is awarded a suffocating sense of tangibility, visible in tropes of 'pea-soup' fog and 'twice breathed air'. The atmosphere itself seems to corrupt by its touch: in *The Nether World,* for instance, 'it seemed […] that the air was poisoned with the odour of an unclean crowd.'[30] The sense of claustrophobia and suffocation in the thick city air was both informed by very real considerations of urban smog, and by imaginative anxieties surrounding the dehumanising effects of urban life and revulsion from dirty bodies.

Nicolas Kenny has written of the 'feel of the city', and the ways in which people related their sensorial encounters with the urban landscape, that the 'senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch were mobilised in defining conceptions of and attitudes towards city

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[27] Carpenter, for instance, wrote in rapturously emotionalised terms of the "cleanliness" of a vegetarian diet: '[…] which all means cleanness. The unity of our nature being restored, the instinct of bodily cleanness, *both* within and without, which is such a marked characteristic of the animals, will again characterise mankind. […] dirt being only disorder and obstruction. And thus the whole human being, mind and body, becoming clean and radiant from its inmost centre to its farthest circumference – "transfigured" – the distinction between the word spiritual and material disappears.' Carpenter, p.62.

[28] Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.248.

[29] Gissing, *The Nether World*, pp. 203 and 280; and Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, pp.139 and 162.

[30] Gissing, *The Nether World,* pp.273-4.

environments'; 'physical and sensorial experiences placed the body on the front lines of individuals' interaction with […] the city.'[31] In uncovering the corporeal experiences of the modern city, Kenny suggests that interactions with urban and industrial spaces accentuated people's awareness of their own bodies.[32] In this way, the sense of intense revulsion from the touch of urban stimuli was perhaps related to an accentuated sense of the vulnerability and permeability of the human body in the urban environment. Disgust at, and revulsion from unpleasant sensory experiences entails a kind of bodily, visceral rejection of sensory stimuli. Disgust is often an emotion associated with the maintenance of boundaries, both physical and psychological – the desire to demarcate dirt from clean, and self from environment. It also seems to relate to a heightened sense of bodily disgust and shame amid the proximity of other people. Anxieties about the body and the human condition became magnified amid the density of human settlement in the modern city. Writing in *The Heart of the Empire*, the liberal politician and supporter of the settlement movement Philip Whitwell Wilson voiced (in somewhat startling terms) Christian concerns surrounding man's essential corruption:

> God meant men to live in a world where natural, non-human sights and sounds, like the braying of an ass or the glory of a field of buttercups, should on the whole predominate his leisure hours. It is not that these farmyard rusticities are always grateful, either to eye or ear. But they are wholesome. A city is a place where man has a monopoly, and where man is therefore almost wholly vile. Humanity is an admirable institution when it is well diluted, but we should ever consider that Adam and Eve – alone – were too human for the garden of Eden.[33]

There is a widespread sense in late Victorian and Edwardian culture that nature purifies by its touch; separated from the cleansing properties of natural life, in which organic processes transform dirt to clean, humanity is seen at once to corrupt, and be corrupted by the urban environment. The need to 'dilute' humanity is repeatedly voiced in the literature of the period, both implicitly and explicitly.

This sense of human corruption was dramatised in contemporary attitudes towards the management of sewage and human waste in the urban environment, which represented the extremities of revulsion from contact and contagion. In Richard Jefferies' post-apocalyptic vision of England, *After London,* the dominant vision of London is one subsumed and

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[31] Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiences of Urban Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp.11-2.
[32] Kenny, p.5.
[33] P. Whitwell Wilson, 'The Distribution of Industry', in Charles Masterman (ed), *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp.233-4.

putrefying under the accumulated filth of urban waste – in John Goode's words, 'submerged under a swamp of its own cloacal excess.'[34] The treatment of the capital's fate in *After London* is curious, in that it stands somewhat apart from Jefferies' wider narrative of England's re-wilding. The opening pages of the novel detail at length Jefferies' unflinchingly evolutionary vision of a return to nature after civilisation: plagues of rats are sustained by grain stores in abandoned villages, riversides are overcome with reeds and sedges, fields are covered by bracken, and dogs revert to wild species and prey upon the remaining domesticated animals. Yet London remains covered by a poisonous swamp – a vast dead zone in which noxious vapours kill anyone who enters it:

> He had penetrated into the midst of that dreadful place, of which he had heard many a tradition: how the earth was poison, the water poison, the air poison, the very light of heaven, falling through such an atmosphere, poison. […] It was the very essence of corruption. […] Felix involuntarily put his hands to his ears lest the darkness of the air should whisper some horror of old times.[35]

Indeed, this is not a temporary condition – the swamp becomes ever more poisonous with each year. The swamp seems essentially tainted by the memory of human existence – indeed its poison is physically comprised of human waste and the bodies 'of millions of human beings […] festering under the stagnant water.'[36] Smaller cities have been affected to a lesser degree: 'there are not always swamps, but the sites are uninhabitable because of the emanations from the ruins. […] Even the spot where has single house has been known to have existed, is avoided.' Furthermore for the surviving men and women of this post-apocalyptic future, 'a change and sweeping away of the human evil that had accumulated was necessary, and was effected by [unspecified] supernatural means.'[37] The swamp of bodily waste and matter thus emerges as symbolic of the extent of human evil and corruption in the modern city, which taints all that it touches, and has irreparably broken from the forces and processes of the natural world. Whilst Jefferies' narrative is, in the main, naturalistic, his treatment of humanity stands apart from nature, and is pervaded by a sense of modern man's fundamental corruption – which becomes disastrously magnified amid the density of urban population. Edward Carpenter, too, despite his avowedly naturalistic approach to the problem

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[34] John Goode, 'Writing Beyond the End', in John Stokes (ed), *Fin de Siècle, fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the late Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992), p.16.
[35] Richard Jefferies, *After London, or Wild England* (1885; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), pp.161-2.
[36] Jefferies, p.32.
[37] Jefferies, p.33.

of the human condition in modernity, often wrote in terms of bodily pollution and cleanliness that echoed essentially Christian anxieties surrounding human corruption.[38] Modern existence is evoked through terms of humanity as a stain upon the essential innocence of nature. Carpenter was prone to misanthropic assertions such as: 'Man is the only animal who, instead of adorning and beautifying, makes Nature hideous by his presence.'[39] Despite his deeply-held belief in the need to overcome the Christian sense of sin and bodily shame, and to return to primitive simplicity, Carpenter's writing is still, at times, informed by a sense of human taint, and implicit anxieties surrounding the polluted and polluting nature of human bodies in modern civilisation.

   Jefferies' treatment of human waste reveals a further dimension of anxiety about urban life: that the artificiality of the city represented a fundamental intervention in natural cycles, breaking down ecological processes of regeneration. The density of population in the built environment compelled contemporaries to confront the spectacle of their own waste in ways that generated anxieties, both real and imaginative, about unmanageable dirt and disorder. As Slavoj Žižek writes: 'according to Lacan, one of the features which distinguishes man from the animals is precisely that with humans the disposal of shit becomes a problem'; questions of how the subject should relate to their own waste impinge as much upon ideology and emotion as upon utilitarian considerations.[40] Of course, the question of how to manage urban sewage was an immediate and pressing problem in nineteenth-century cities, yet there is a further element to these anxieties – beyond practical considerations of disease and hygiene – which relates to anthropological conceptualisations of dirt as 'matter out of place', as well as to the fracturing of the relationship between man and environment.[41] Jefferies' vision of London as deluged forever under a swamp of human waste represents the logical end point of human life lived apart from ecological systems. This is perhaps the context in which to understand the pervasiveness in late Victorian and Edwardian culture of tropes that counterpose urban life to a society 'in touch with the earth' or 'in touch with the soil' (and of

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[38] For example, Carpenter envisaged that in the ideal society of the future: 'The unity of our nature being restored, the instinct of bodily cleanness, *both* within and without, which is such a marked characteristic of the animals, will again characterise mankind… dirt being only disorder and obstruction. And thus the whole human being, mind and body, becoming clean and radiant from its inmost centre to its farthest circumference – "transfigured" – the distinction between the word spiritual and material disappears. Carpenter, 'Civilisation', p.62.

[39] Carpenter, p.63.

[40] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2008), p.4. See also Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit* (London: MIT Press, 2002).

[41] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 2001), 'Introduction' and p.165.

folk wisdom which designates soil as "clean dirt"). Separated from ecological systems which process and compost waste, an image of human existence emerges in which people consume, and in turn generate undiminishing quantities of waste, which remain permanently "out of place".

Indeed, Jan Marsh has written that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century attitudes towards sewage and sanitary reform in the 'back-to-the-land' movement should be considered holistically, in the same ideological context as dietary and dress reform. [42] Amongst those who advocated 'natural' methods of waste disposal in favour of water-borne sewage systems, there was a focus upon nature as cleansing and self-regulating in ways for which cities could not substitute. Whilst cities could only accrue and then, at best, displace contamination – risking pollution elsewhere – the breakdown of organic matter in soil meant that dirt was never "out of place" in nature for long. Marsh cites the sanitary reformer George Vivian Poore, whose *Essays in Rural Hygiene* advocated the use of earth closets, arguing that 'no house can be securely and permanently wholesome unless it have tolerably direct relations with cultivable land.'[43] Poore wrote with great pride of fertilising his cottage garden with the contents of his earth closet, accompanying his account with pictures of bounteous soft fruit harvested from his method. There is a sense of satisfaction and completeness derived from the knowledge that Poore participated in his own enclosed system of order, regulation and purification. If Jefferies' post-apocalyptic London represents the logical end-point of human waste accumulating amid the artificiality of the city, Poore's self-contained cycle of fertilisation, production and consumption, in which human life is assimilated entirely within natural rhythms of reaping and sowing, represents the extremity of the organic ideal of rural life.

Whilst sensory impressions of the urban landscape were often evoked in terms of revulsion from touch, sense experience of the countryside was generally described in a register of assimilation and absorption, in which people are literally 'in touch' with the earth. In the city, objects of sense perception were frequently apprehended in terms of external threat: foul smells, urban grime, pollution, and the discordant noises of street traffic and industrial machinery were perceived as dangerous stimuli which threatened to impact and disorder the vulnerable and unprotected human body, and which must be repulsed or kept at bay. In

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[42] Marsh, pp.201-2.
[43] George Vivian Poore, *Essays in Rural Hygiene* (1893), quoted in Marsh, p.203.

contrast, there was a widespread cultural emphasis upon the permeability of the body in nature as welcome and desirable: of the beauty of *taking in* nature through the senses. This was often literal: in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* for instance, Hardy's rural inhabitants are idealised through their partaking in the English landscape. A woman working in the fields becomes 'part and parcel of outdoor nature': 'she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated her self with it.'[44] Such assimilation was not simply understood as a purely literary 'way of knowing' the countryside, but as a physical experience that could supplement 'book learning' about nature. Writing of urban childhoods in *The Heart of the Empire,* Reginald Bray lamented that 'all that is inspiring in the country is a sealed book to the town child – the beauty of sunrise and sunset, the changes of the seasons, the fresh green of spring and the red gold of autumn, and all the loveliness of the night –.'[45] Bray wrote of the pressing need for trips to the countryside to be organised for urban children 'so that they can learn the meaning of fields and woods, so that descriptions of country scenery in the books they read […] become now intelligible.' It was not a question of 'learn[ing] something of nature' so much as learning to 'feel it'.[46] For Bray, there was a sense of the fundamental meaning that existed in entering into, and immersing oneself within the seasonal and diurnal rhythms of nature; true knowledge existed in intimate familiarity with the countryside, in the borderline between feeling as a process of touching and feeling as a form of understanding.

Sensory historians have written of the importance to historical experience of the haptic – the ways in which people recognise and conceive of their worlds through the sense of touch. In the history of the senses, modernity has often been understood as an age which progressively downgraded the pre-modern importance of touch and smell as 'ways of knowing', and increasingly asserted the dominance of the visual.[47] Mass urban society, in particular, has often been read as a site of haptic deprivation, in which subjects increasingly withdrew from public space and social contact, retreating into the insulated space of the home

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[44] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles,* (1891; Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p.77.
[45] Reginald Bray, 'The Children of the Town', in Masterman (ed), p.116.
[46] Bray, pp.130-1.
[47] See historiographical discussion in Mark M. Smith, *Sensory History* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp.95-101; Constance Classen, 'Introduction: The Transformation of Perception', in Constance Classen (ed), *A Cultural History of the Senses,* vol. 5, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), esp p.18.

to consume visual media in isolation.[48] Recently, however, sensory historians such as Mark Smith and David Chidester have emphasised the importance of tactility to our understanding of modernity, emphasising that 'the task for the historian is to show how protocols of touch, meanings of hapticity, and ideas surrounding touch and skin changed over time, rather than accepting the easy and largely undocumented claim that the rise of print and the Enlightenment greatly reduced touch's importance.'[49] In this reading, 'haptic modernity' emerged as a post-Enlightenment development in which the sense of touch was not so much 'downgraded' in importance, as increasingly policed; associated with pollution and contagion in the form of disease and sexuality.[50]

Yet, in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, this association of touch with pollution and contagion was one that was overwhelmingly restricted to the experience of urban space. As we have seen, contemporaries both conveyed urban life in terms of disgust and revulsion from the unpleasant feel and the smell of the city, and expressed deep anxiety towards the giddy multiplication of nervous stimuli, in which the nervous system was seen to become exhausted by the speed and confusion of visual and aural sense impressions, and in which 'all that is solid melts into air'.[51] In contrast, the experience of nature was conveyed in terms of the serene harmony of sight, sound and scent; of the reassuring solidity of experience; and of the fundamental sanity of touch. To touch and to feel nature was almost universally regarded as both essential to physical and emotional health, and a means of re-connecting with pre-modern and childlike modes of existence. Clive Wilmer writes of William Morris' nostalgia, for instance, that 'this *feeling* for a *physical substance* of rural England, blighted by industrial capitalism, is at the core of all Morris' work' [my italics].[52] For Edward Carpenter, too, touch was a fundamental mode of rural as well as pre-modern experience that had been degraded and rendered suspect in urban modernity. He wrote of humanity before civilisation that 'their

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[48] See, for instance, discussion of Michel Serres 'Les Cinq Sens' in David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the senses in society* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.10. Richard Sennett has also read the modern city as a site of 'sensory deprivation' and 'tactile sterility' – a process that he views as beginning in eighteenth-century urban architecture, and culminating in an image of individuals retreating into private spaces to view the world through computer screens. Richard Sennett, Richard, *Flesh and Stone: the Body and the City in Western Civilization,* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 1994), pp.15-22.
[49] Smith, pp.95-9; David Chidester, 'The American Touch: Tactile Imagery in American Religion and Politics', in Constance Classen (ed.), *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p.61.
[50] Smith, ppp.99-102.
[51] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), pp.13-15. The book's title borrows Marx's well-known formulation in *The Communist Manifesto* as a metaphor for the experience of modernity.
[52] Clive Wilmer, 'Introduction', in William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, An Epoch of Rest,* (1890), in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings,* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp.xxiv-xxv.

strong *feeling* of union with the universal spirit, probably only dimly self conscious, but expressing itself very markedly and clearly in their customs, is most strange and pregnant of meaning.'[53] In contrast, modern urban life was characterised by insulation from nature's touch: '[man] deliberately turns his back upon the light of the sun, and hides himself away in boxes with breathing holes (which he calls houses), living ever more and more in darkness and asphyxia'. For Carpenter, late Victorian society was encased in a kind of 'mummydom of centuries' in which the individual existed 'like [a] funny old chrysalis': 'man needs to exfoliate to evolve'.[54] The way forward lay in exposing skin to touch, and the opening of the human body to nature: 'whether it be the head that goes uncovered to the air of heaven, or the feet that press the bare magnetic earth, or the elementary raiment that allows through its meshes the light itself to reach the vital organs'.[55]

In Search of the Sublime

Sensory historians emphasise, too, the importance to historical experience of intersensoriality: 'the manifold relations among the different senses'; 'the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies'.[56] The impulse to compound the senses is often associated with moments of particular intensity and exceptionality: 'the desire to go beyond the ordinary sense economies of the everyday world.'[57] Across a wide variety of genres, the experience of nature was written in a register of intersensorial loveliness, in which the sights, sounds, scents and feel of the countryside intermingled to produce a sense of the transcendent or sublime. In novels such as Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and Forster's *Howards End*, the succulent sensuality of descriptions of the countryside conveys a deep sense of meaningfulness, and an idealist sense of a wider reality beyond the confines of human dramas. Writing of the need to teach urban children a 'feel' for the countryside, Reginald Bray likened the sensuous experience of nature to the sensuous experience of religion, in which the multi-sensorial experience of candles, incense and music created a sense of the elevated and divine.[58] Urban-born working-class autobiographers, in describing

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[53] Carpenter, pp.43-3.
[54] Carpenter, pp.58-9.
[55] Carpenter, p.60.
[56] Howes and Classen, p.5; Howes, p.9.
[57] Steven Connor, 'Intersensoriality' [http://www.stevenconnor.com/intersensoriality/]
[58] Bray, p.137.

their first experiences of nature, often reached for synaesthetic metaphors in which they 'drank in' the scent of grass, or tasted the 'nectar' of a rural landscape, in order to convey the extraordinary intensity of experience.

It is important to clarify, here, the specific understanding of the sublime that was prevalent in late Victorian and Edwardian high culture. This is not the Burkean sublime, counterposed to the beautiful and associated with dread, horror and the aestheticised enjoyment of fear. Rather, it is a more suburbanised, secular-sacred sublime – a state of mind in which heightened sensibility, aesthetic sensitivity and a kind of extra-rational intensity produce a sense of wonder, and the apprehension of the transcendent. This 'softened' conception of the sublime, which de-emphasised fear in favour of an association with the beautiful, can be found in much late nineteenth- and early twentieth century literature.[59] Lynne Hapgood argues that the contemporary experience of urbanisation prompted novelists to suburbanise the Romantic impulse. Literary interest moved 'from the excitement of extremes […] wildness/nature/heightened sensibility/the sublime' towards a gentler, vaguer and more domesticated conception of romance; a yearning for rural experience and a feeling for nature as something primitive, picturesque and poetic.[60] This is a kind of compensatory nostalgia which accepts urbanity as the 'norm', yet seeks occasional relief from it. Leo Marx similarly characterised the nineteenth-century yearning for the pastoral as 'semi-primitivism': 'a middle ground somewhere "between", yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilisation and nature.'[61] Desire for the picturesque order of the rural and semi-rural spaces of the English countryside thus represents an oasis from the anxieties of both city and wilderness.

This identification of the semi-rural suburban landscape with a romanticised sense of the transcendent or sublime was widespread in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture. Hapgood writes of the enormous popularity of nature writing and Romantic literature amongst the urban and suburban middle and lower-middle classes that the sublime was

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[59] Whilst the Burkean sublime counterposed the sublime and the beautiful, Ruskin's influential theory of the sublime, for instance, attempted to embrace beauty and identify it *with* the sublime. His concept of the 'picturesque' offered a more positive mode of sublimity. See Lara Baker Wheelan, *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp.125-9; George P. Landow, *Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), ch.3.
[60] Hapgood, p.10.
[61] Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.23.

'domesticated in garden romances, or mediated through the words of the Romantic poets in pocket editions that were the companions of suburban walks.' Across the social spectrum, these intermittent experiences of nature, mediated by imaginative literature, became envisaged as a panacea for diffuse anxieties surrounding modernity and urban life. Nature, thus defined, served as a pantheistic substitute for religion – a source of re-enchantment amid the putatively disenchanting and disintegrating tendencies of the age.[62] Hapgood argues that what readers of nature writing sought

> was artistic consciousness; sensitivity to the world and its beauty; a delight in flowers, weather and landforms; and information about people who lived away from the city. These motifs […] arguably offered them a desirable but unspecific meaningfulness that could fill a spiritual vacuum and provide an apparently traditional and stable framework for thought. Walkers could take their church out of doors and enjoy an undefined and de-institutionalised personal spiritual experience through words about nature.[63]

The accounts of working-class autobiographers attest to the popular appetite for, and sensitivity to, the aesthesticised experience of nature. Indeed, aesthetic dissatisfaction with urban life could often be occasioned or reinforced by the reading of literature that emphasised the spiritual value of natural beauty: Henry Snell recalled that as a young man, 'it was Morris who first made me consciously aware of the ugliness of society which so arranged its affairs that its workers were deprived of the beauty which life should give.'[64] But for others, dissatisfaction with the ugliness of the city was presented as a lifelong concern, originating in childhood. Grace Foakes wrote of London's East End: 'my earliest recollection of the world is that it was a grey place; its factories, houses, churches and tall buildings had no kind of colour at all. Even the people looked grey'; 'I longed to put a little colour around me when I was a child'. [65]

Autobiographers almost universally regarded the experience of nature and beauty as essential for human happiness. One of the most common themes in autobiographies is the

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[62] As Jan Marsh writes: 'The attraction was partly personal, partly political and partly based on a pantheistic substitute for religion. Science and Darwinism had undermined conventional Christianity, and Nature offered a viable alternative – the earth as the source of all goodness in place of God, a mystical deity without the archaic mythology.' Marsh, pp.4-5.
[63] Hapgood, p.69.
[64] Henry Snell, *Men, Movements and Myself,* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1936), p.57.
[65] Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River,* (London, Shepheard-Walwyn, 1974). p.2.

author's epiphanic experience, as a child, of experiencing nature for the first time. Emanuel Shinwell's account is typical:

> Another revealing incident occurred when I was sent to deliver a parcel to a shop just outside the Glasgow area. There I found the air was much fresher; in the distance were many trees, and it all seemed so different from where I lived. So, instead of returning, I walked on and came to a narrow lane and saw for the first time hedges covered with roses. I learned later that they were wild roses. I was thrilled and stood gazing at them […] In all the years that have passed since – just about eighty – I have never forgotten the sight of that hedge; I had no idea that such lovely things existed.[66]

The account is illustrative, too, of another common trope in the autobiographies, in which the border between country and city becomes a site of sensory intensity, emotional revelation and discovery. Percy Wall wrote of walking outwards from London, past Wimbledon common: 'here was open country where the imagination could rove freely'.[67] At such moments, authors often narrate their memories of the heightening, intensifying and intermingling of sense experience. Echoing Leonard Bast's night-time walk out of London in *Howards End*, sensory apprehension of nature provided a meaningful sense of 'something' more 'real' than the everyday realities of urban life. Frank Goss described wandering throughout London, as a child, and out onto Hampstead Heath: 'At just about the spot where Hampstead Road finishes and Spaniards Road starts, my mental reaction to the physical world changed. The very air seemed to have a different texture; the clouds and sky, the grass and the trees all presented themselves in different, sharper tones.'[68]

The experience of nature is described in sensual, joyful, and often spiritual terms; many authors convey their childhood experiences of nature in quasi-religious language, describing the countryside as divine, or a paradise, where they experience 'deep stirrings of the soul'.[69] David---, raised in a Glasgow tenement, wrote of travelling to his childhood holidays in Arran: 'I looked forward to the splash of the horse's hooves as it crossed the Catacol stream, which ran with crystal clearness over golden sand. I looked on this fording of the water as a kind of lustral rite which prepared me to enter into the bliss of the surrounding countryside.'[70] V. W. Garratt, travelling from Birmingham to the countryside for the first time, experienced a

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[66] Emanuel Shinwell, *Lead With the Left: My First Ninety-six Years,* (London: Cassell Ltd, 1981), p.26.
[67] Percy Wall, *Hour at Eve,* TS, 3:186, Burnett Archive of Working-Class Autobiography, p.44.
[68] Frank Goss, My Boyhood at the Turn of the Century, TS, 2:331, Burnett Archive, p.92.
[69] Whittaker, p.44.
[70] David---, Ernest Raymond (ed), *The Autobiography of David---,* (London: Victor Gollanncz Ltd, 1946), pp.41-2.

sense of serenity and organic wholeness: 'to town-dwellers few joys can equal that of waking at dawn in an old country cottage, stepping out into the fresh scented air and the calm of the springing life around, and feeling the harmony of man, bird and beast.'[71] For James Whittaker, a childhood summer spent in the Scottish countryside, after the slums of Edinburgh and Leith, was an intoxicating combination of pure, sensuous pleasure, spiritual awakening, and almost overwhelming ecstasy; a kind of agony of joy. The experience of nature is described in a register of intersensorial loveliness, as the sights, sounds and scents of nature combined in an intensely spiritual experience of 'exquisite rapture':

> The memory of that summer is to feel again one long, continual blaze of sunlight, and to remember one never-ending draught of sweet, sweet air. […] It was sheer nectar to me, after the stinking squalidity and the dirty frowsiness and decay of my usual surroundings […] Mid-day at Corstorphine was truly a purple glow. The whole world seemed to sink into a warm, fragranced haze. All that was dead, dirty and decaying vanished, seeming never to have existed. In that hour I entered Paradise.[72]

> I met cows at Corstorphine; saw little rivers; discovered ferns and plants, reeds and rushes; heard birds; smelled flowers and grass and herbs, and saw vegetables growing […] For the first time in my life I knew beauty existed; and I have never forgotten to look for that priceless and painful thing since […] the emotion I knew, swelling within my breast until it hurt and almost choked me, as I drank in the sweet-rankness of that dark grass[.][73]

There is an element of synaesthesia and sensual intensity to Whittaker's experience of emotion, in which the intensity of sensual pleasure culminates in almost physical pain. This impressionistic catalogue of the sights, sounds, scents and feel of the countryside was linked, for many autobiographers, with their discovery of an aesthetic sensibility, and a more meaningful sense of reality than could be apprehended in urban sensory experience.

Emotional Compensations

In common with Romantic writers, working-class autobiographers indicted the modern industrial city for its indifference to beauty. V. W. Garratt, working in a Birmingham sheet-metal factory, identified the industrial revolution with spiritual and aesthetic impoverishment, counterposing the natural beauty of Stratford-upon-Avon to the enervating ugliness of

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[71] Garratt, p.58.
[72] Whittaker, pp.44-5.
[73] Whittaker, p.46.

Birmingham: 'one has only to imagine the fate that would have befallen a Shakespeare born in a modern industrial town, wherein a murky, massive column would have been the chief memorial attraction.' He retained a faith, though, in the redemptive powers of literature and the appreciation of beauty: he expressed hope that fostering a love of poetry amongst the population 'would be sufficient to stamp out much of the ugliness and squalor that unpoetical minds have created.'[74] Whittaker, too, believed that his fellow slum-dwellers might be elevated and redeemed if only they could experience beauty. Recalling his childhood visits to Edinburgh's museums, he wrote that

> I wanted to collect sculptures, busts, swords; ancient jars, Chinese pottery and goblets; Japanese screens, Italian carvings. I wanted to gather together all the beauty man had created – and can create when he chooses – and then bring people to it: people from the small hovels and dilapidated houses, from the narrow, squalid byways, so that they might be warmed and purified in the beauty before them.[75]

The accounts of working-class autobiographers reveal the deeply felt need for the experience of beauty, and the ways in which both nature and literature could function as antidotes to the aesthetic poverty of the modern industrial city.

For many working-class autobiographers, access to nature could make urban life palatable, providing an emotional compensation for the ugliness of the city. In adulthood, many autobiographers describe the importance to their emotional wellbeing of visits to the countryside. For V. W. Garratt, the anxiety and depression he felt at the monotony and mechanical nature of life in an industrial city could be relieved by walks in the country. He wrote that factory work made him 'mentally sick', but that 'week-end hikes over the fields and lanes of the Midland shire put strength into my lungs and joy into my heart which fortified me against the poisons and depressions of work-a-day life.'[76] Nature could be brought into the city, too: several autobiographers detail their attempts to cultivate plants in the polluted atmosphere of slum life, according emotional resonance to the image of nature struggling to maintain itself amid the artificiality of the city. Walter Southgate wrote of the efforts of urbanites 'to bring anaemic looking plants to flower in a sunless zone', and recalled that in the tiny back yard of his family's tenement,

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[74] V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1939), pp.63 and 93.
[75] James Whittaker, *I, James Whittaker* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1934), p.57.
[76] Garratt, pp.116 and 131.

Every year father planted a few geraniums and blue lobelia plants but with the soot, lack of sun and cinder ash in the soil they lingered to a premature death. Nevertheless he persisted and encouraged mother to plant her favourite pot of musk [...] If a tuft of grass appeared in the crevices of stones and clinker she would tend it as if it was a lily, so divorced totally was she from the country scene. It reminded her, she said, "of the country".[77]

This impulse to care for and tend to even the smallest growths of natural life was shared by Grace Foakes, who as a child went to great lengths to cultivate greenery in her 'grey and cheerless' back yard. She remembered that she would beg her mother to save carrot tops from the preparation of family meals, keeping them in tins of water: 'I thought the carrot-tops were especially beautiful, with their delicate, feathery leaves […] The pleasure in watching them grow can only be appreciated by those who love colour and gardens, and are denied them.'[78] Of her urban garden, Foakes wrote in deeply emotional terms: 'I shall never be able to describe what I felt […] No plants anywhere were ever tended so carefully or loved so much.'[79] She wrote that, growing up in a London slum, she felt a 'great longing […] for the sight of trees and flowers'; a view shared by Winifred Till, who 'loved flowers but was bereft of them in London.'[80] Similarly, Jack Goring detailed his attempts to create an urban garden:

As a little fellow I was constantly on the watch for signs of the country invading the town. These I found in the tiny blades of grass I saw springing here and there, between the granite sets in the road […] In the middle of one road I even planted cherry stones believing they would grow into cherry trees. They were to be nourished by the occasional visits of the water-card and would help in time to transform the town into country.[81]

Autobiographers found happiness not just in natural beauty and physical escape to unspoiled countryside, but also in imaginative escape from the daily realities of urban life. Returning from a childhood summer in the countryside, James Whittaker's hatred of his Edinburgh tenement intensified, and he felt increasingly lost and alienated from slum life. Yet he was able to regain a measure of the serene contentment he experienced in nature by repeated visits to museums:

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[77] Walter Southgate, *That's the Way it Was: A Working-Class Autobiography, 1850-1950* (Oxted, Surrey: New Clarion Press, 1982), p.19.

[78] Foakes, *Between High Walls: A London Childhood,* in *My Part of the River: Memories of people and places in the East End of Edwardian London*, (London: Futura, 1988), p.190.

[79] Foakes, *Between High Walls,* p.30.

[80] Foakes, *Between High Walls,* p.30; Winifred Till, The Early Years of a Victorian Grandmother, TS, 2:763, Burnett Archive, p.7.

[81] Jack Goring, *Untitled,* MS, Burnett Archive, pp.30A-30B.

> The Egyptian relics attracted me most of all, and in their presence I felt […] a sensation which seemed to smooth away all the rough dirtiness and misery in the life I knew. I used to look at the mummies and feel that the immobile peace they radiated had gone from the world and would never more return. I used to look at the sarcophagi, and in the time-mellowed colours see the beauty of a real world whose pristine sweetness man's ingenuity had destroyed.[82]

For Whittaker, beautiful objects could counter the materialist emptiness of the modern city, providing fleeting access to lost or imagined ways of life that were felt to have disappeared in a world of industrial machinery and hurry. In this sense, the city was also the site of imaginative resources which could compensate for the loss of access to the beauty and inspirations of nature. Percy Wall, too, wrote of visits to the Natural History Museum: 'here was an extension of experience that the bustling streets could not give; observation of the exhibits was not distracted by movement and so could not be more thorough', suggesting that such imaginative resources could also compensate for the limitations of everyday life amid the urban crowd.[83] As Jonathan Rose has demonstrated, the long tradition of anti-urbanism in English literature (typified in the Edwardian period by Forster's *Howards End*) was not one that extended straightforwardly to the working-class intelligentsia, who often rejected modernist disdain for mass urban life and celebrated the city as a site of self-education and cultural and intellectual opportunity. [84] Love of nature was not, as it was in much of the period's fiction and social commentary, elided with a rejection of the city that stemmed from the supposedly deadening effects of mass urban culture.[85]

Literature could provide a similar imaginative and aesthetic escape for autobiographers who were dissatisfied with the ugliness and monotony of everyday life in the city. V. W. Garratt wrote that whilst 'the conflicting ugliness of factory life often drove my spirits into the depths', he 'rushed to poetry for escape and lived a double existence by seeking the slopes of Parnassus in thought while my hands mechanically soldered lead fittings or malletted sheet metal into shape at the grimy benches of the workshop.' He found 'self-realisation' in the experience of literary beauty, and like Whittaker found that it brought him

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[82] Whittaker, p.47.
[83] Percy Wall, Hour at Eve, TS, 3:186, Burnett Archive, p.48.
[84] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.409-13.
[85] Indeed, Christopher Hilliard has written that the early twentieth-century popular readership was hostile to modernism – this was a hostility underpinned by their identification with Romantic literature that celebrated the pleasures of nature. See Christopher Hilliard, 'Modernism and the Common Writer', *The Historical Journal,* 48, 3 (2005), pp.769 and 772.

spiritual fulfillment in an otherwise mundane and profane urban environment: 'from poetry […] I derived an ecstasy that flowed from the sense of the beauty and the majesty of creation. It was all-absorbing, unequivocal and complete, and raised me to the spiritual exaltations which swamped the trivialities of life'.[86] Working-class autodidacts were explicitly aware that literature functioned as an imaginative escape from the privations of urban life. Harry Young described his discovery of books in a public library as 'El Dorado, my "Shangri-la", my "City of the Sun".' The characters in the books he read were 'so far removed from my hard poverty stricken life as it was possible to be. Yet, I knew them all, they were as real to me as the mole on my face.'[87] This sense that the imaginative life of literature was more 'real' than the reality of his daily life was shared by Percy Wall, who remembered his father reading Dickens, Mark Twain and Robert Blatchford to him in the evenings: 'It seemed to us that the world they portrayed was more real than the world around us. Here was the compensation for the things we missed, if you can be said to miss things of whose existence you are but faintly aware.'[88]

Autobiographers often consciously situated themselves within Romantic and pastoral literary tropes. Authors quoted romantic poetry in their descriptions of the countryside, or likened the city to Dante's *Inferno.*[89] With the notable exception of Dickens, their intellectual tastes were predominantly anti-urban and anti-industrial: Hardy, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Morris, and Blatchford.[90] It seems that such literature often gave shape to young autobiographers' sense of discontentment, providing them with a language with which to articulate their anxiety and dissatisfaction with urban life – and, through that language, to compensate for and transcend it. As Rose writes, the vision of an author 'could come as a salutary shock, […] suggesting radical possibilities.'[91] Following Kathleen Woodward's childhood 'rage and anger against the order of things' in the slums of the East End, when she would 'revolve confusedly in my own emotions, without a known aim', she formed an emotional bond with a workmate, in whose carefully cultivated garden Woodward detected

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[86] Garratt, pp.92-3.
[87] Harry Young, *Harry's Biography,* TS, 2:858, Burnett Archive, p.2.
[88] Wall, p.7.
[89] For example, W. N. P. Barbellion [pseud], *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* (1919; London, Hogarth Press, 1984), p.21 and Garratt, p.92.
[90] The exception of Dickens is notable in the sense that James Donald sees Dickens' writings as fulfilling a pedagogical function for his readers, at once addressing and alleviating anxieties surrounding urban life. For Donald, Dickens 'describes an anxiety externalised and figured in the cityscape and the crowd. Here Dickens […] teaches his readers not only how to articulate that anxiety, but also how to manage it.' Donald, p.12.
[91] Rose, pp.7-8.

an ideological sympathy. The friend encouraged her to read Ruskin and *Merrie England,* prompting

> many summer nights that Marian Evelyn and I sat up late and talked long and ardently in her back garden under the mulberry tree […] We discussed how hard it was to break away from that attitude of accepted misery that encompassed us about; the […] soul-deadening lack of spirit in pushing away from Jipping Street, and the factory, and for all which they stood […] I longed for the night to come when I could sit with Marian Evelyn in her back garden, or luxuriate in the company of my books[.][92]

For Woodward, literature seems to have provided coherence to her emotions, enabling her to express and narrate her dissatisfaction with urban life. Many autobiographers describe similar experiences of literature giving form and meaning to their discontentment and questionings, and of detecting an emotional sympathy between writers and themselves.

   Working-class observers expressed deep anxiety over the conditions of life in the modern industrial city. They reveal the emotional challenges presented not just by the material privations of urban poverty, but also by the monotonous and mechanical nature of working-class urban life, and the aesthetic poverty and ugliness of the urban environment. Autobiographers yearned to experience the pleasures of the countryside and natural beauty: they longed for a sense of harmony, wholeness, peace and serenity that they associated with nature, and felt nostalgia for modes of life felt to be lost in an age of urbanisation and industrialisation. But they did not express an unequivocal rejection of the city: working-class observers were aware that, despite its shortcomings, urban life offered them cultural and intellectual as well as economic opportunities, and the promise of self-development and social mobility. Autobiographers could experience a sense of romantic excitement in urban life, and pleasure in wandering through teeming streets and urban crowds. Emotional compensations could be found even for those who feared and resented aspects of urban life. For some, temporary escape to unspoiled countryside provided respite from the material and aesthetic poverty of the urban landscape, whilst carefully tended urban gardens – though modest – could make the urban environment palatable and transform unbeautiful surroundings. For others, who experienced social isolation and alienation from their fellow urbanites (or who perceived themselves as more self-consciously intellectualised than those around them), literature, museums and art galleries provided both an imaginative escape into aesthetic beauty, and a sense of hope that joy and beauty were to be found in life.

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[92] Kathleen Woodward, *Jipping Street* (1928; London: Virago Press, 1983). pp.100 and107-9.

In this respect, the accounts of working-class autobiographers chimed with those of social commentators and urban planners, who believed that museums, art galleries, public libraries and parks might restore to urbanites an ideal of human cultivation and flourishing which was felt to have been threatened or destroyed in urban landscapes that had been shaped by the utilitarian imperatives of industrial capitalism. Yet this itself raises questions about the ability of art and literature to substitute for nature, and the emotional and sensorial status of nature. How important was nature itself, as the domain of certain privileged modes of perception and feeling, and to what extent could the consumption and appreciation of culture substitute for modes of life and thought associated with the rural past?

Social commentators such at the authors of *The Heart of the Empire,* whilst they prescribed remedies to urban ills through intellectual cultivation, spiritual contemplation, and the experience of nature, articulated the sense that something fundamental had been lost in the transition from the 'old, silent life' of agrarian England. Masterman wrote of urban improvements at the turn of the twentieth century that provided sources of 'happiness' and 'real and widespread satisfaction' among the urban poor: 'public libraries are provided with municipal energies; art galleries, polytechnics, technical schools […] excursions and beanfeasts pilgrimage to places of interest and public importance. Children visit the country in the summer under the direction of philanthropic societies.'[93] Yet, in the same chapter, Masterman's misanthropy towards the urban 'masses' generated an alternative picture of mass culture, in which 'severance from nature, and the 'abolition of a background' to life rendered these improvements meaningless:

> Nature is represented by a few withered trees, an occasional glimpse of a changing cloudy sky and an annual beanfeast […] Literature is symbolised by the penny Sunday paper […] Street after street stretches out in which probably not a single book of any kind could be found […] Art, as any self-directed effort after the realisation of beauty, has altogether vanished […] Religion is associated in the opinion of the mass with the noise and fervour of the Salvation Army.[94]

In this reading, the identification of nature with spiritual and aesthetic appreciation, and with the cultivation of 'higher' ideals of humanity, becomes another iteration of intellectual scorn for the urban crowd. The assertion is made that imaginative contemplation has been dulled in

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[93] Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire,* p.18.
[94] Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire,* pp. 20 and 29.

the transition to mass urbanisation, and that neither occasional visits to the countryside, nor urban culture institutions can entirely compensate for this decline. Yet this cultural pessimism about the imaginative capacities of modern urbanites did not predominate in late Victorian and Edwardian culture. There can also be found, among many urban planners and social commentators, much more optimistic assessments of the potential for human flourishing and cultivation in urban life. Patrick Geddes' *City Development,* for instance, aimed to integrate 'cultural betterment' within social and municipal improvement, and argued that the cultivation of imaginative modes of perception among working-class urbanites was just as important as the planning of *rus in urbe* amenities. For Geddes, joy could be cultivated through educating urban dwellers in 'the Art of Seeing', which would in turn enable 'The Seeing of Art'. Teaching the urban working classes to 'a real appreciation of both the beauty of the world and of the artistic rendering of it' would 'give all a substantial new pleasure, an increase of power and even sanity of observation, thought and life'.[95] Charles Ashbee advocated a similar strategy for urban improvements, writing of the need to 'have men and women educated to the delight and understanding of beauty'; 'Beauty is a spiritual force pervading all things, a heritage into which everyone is born, a state to which everyone can attain […] On this conviction the new social order is being built up.'[96]

Geddes' and Ashbee's view of the social and instrumental value of art was strongly shared by working-class autobiographers, who frequently wrote of their own personal 'revelations' and 'self-realisations' in the discovery of beauty, and believed that those around them would similarly be transformed by fostering a love of beauty through literature and art. In this reading, nostalgia for nature was not so much a manifestation of anti-urban sentiment, but a compensatory nostalgia that accepted urbanity as the 'norm', yet which sought emotional compensations for the deficiencies of the urban environment, and sources of enchantment that centred on the appreciation of beauty. The experience of nature (however small or fleeting), imaginative literature, and art alike were envisaged as means through which joy and agency could be found in modern urban and industrial life.

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[95] Patrick Geddes, *City Development: A Study of Parks, Gardens and Culture-Institutes* (Birmingham: The Saint George Press, 1904), pp.168-9.
[96] C. R. Ashbee, *Where the Great City Stands: A Study in the New Civics* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1917), pp.57 and 6.

Conclusion

The distinctive character of urban anxiety in late Victorian and Edwardian culture was informed both by a new awareness of mass urban life as the 'norm', and by a new and intensified cultural preoccupation with anxiety itself. Across a wide range of discourses, contemporary observers confronted the possibilities and problems of urban life, for the first time, with the awareness that England was more urban than rural in nature. Life in cities was increasingly seen to represent the state of the nation, and was, in turn, shaping a new, distinctively modern consciousness.

The period has often been identified as one in which anxieties about urbanisation and industrial predominated: a 'return to pessimism' after the optimism of the mid-Victorian 'Age of Equipoise'. [1] Studies of Victorian and Edwardian urban representations and experiences have, most often, identified the years 1880-1914 as a distinctive, and largely cohesive period. Indeed, the thesis has followed this chronology, for two broad reasons. The first is that late Victorian reformers themselves identified the 1880s as a turning point, in which an intensified awareness of urban poverty and overcrowding coincided with a range of psychological and social crises that permeated intellectual and literary culture: anxieties about imperial and national decline, degeneration, social unrest, spiritual disenchantment, and unease about the nature of modernity.

Anxieties about urban life did not remain entirely static throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Whilst, in the 1880s, social commentators had tended to focus upon the problems of poverty and inadequate housing for the urban working classes, locating urban anxieties primarily in slum neighbourhoods, by the turn of the twentieth century observers of

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[1] For example, Andrew Lees writes of 'the return to pessimism', whilst Bruce Coleman characterised the period as one in which 'the doubts return[ed]'. Judith Walkowitz has written of the 'crisis of the 1880s': 'experienced as a turning point by so many late Victorian reformers,' it 'was not only a response to the material crisis of London employment and housing: it was also very much a product of bourgeois self-doubt.' More recently, Richard Dennis has described these attitudes as 'chasmic', in which late Victorian cities were characterised by assessments of 'social failure'.
Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.106; Bruce Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp.10 and 168; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p.29; Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.31-2.

urban life were increasingly focussing on more diffuse and pervasive anxieties. An awareness of the problems of urban poverty and slum neighbourhoods continued throughout the period – indeed, fears of physical deterioration and degeneration among the urban poor became intensified in the early 1900s, following concerns over the fitness of recruits for the Boer War. Yet these fears increasingly intermingled with new anxieties that were generated by changing urban topography, in which suburban sprawl was rapidly creating new types of urban region – often hastily jerry-built without an overarching plan. Anxieties about urban poverty and unrest began to coincide with new anxieties about the expanding class of materially comfortable lower-middle-class urban- and suburbanites. Social commentators and novelists worried that a new 'type' of urbanite was being formed in these regions, whose lives were characterised by monotony, uniformity, and mechanical acquiescence; conditions that they worried were central to the experience of modernity. Moreover, Edwardian social commentators such as Charles Masterman, who looked back on the Victorian era in retrospect, reflected on an uneasy sense that optimism about their ability to solve urban problems had evaporated. In the opening years of the twentieth century, observers frequently contrasted the political and social energies of the 1880s with a growing sense of torpidity and paralysis in the face of the scale of urban problems. The scale and complexity of the modern industrial city seemed to many observers to defy attempts to conceive of it as a coherent whole, and dwarfed human efforts to remedy urban problems.

It has been beyond the scope of this study to examine wartime attitudes towards cities, or to examine the intersection of wartime mentalities and discourses of urban life. Yet, as Andrew Lees has noted, in the years immediately preceding 1914, anxieties about the city seemed to be receding from consciousness in Britain: expressions of civic pride were becoming ever more widespread, whilst urban planners such as Patrick Geddes perceived themselves to be on the cusp of a new age of urban renewal.[2] After the war, national debates would become refocused from abstract debates about the future of urban civilisation to more specific anxieties about economic depression, mass unemployment, and the decline of heavy industry.

The second reason for following this periodisation has been to make a series of interventions into the historiography of urban experiences and representations. In the reading of the late Victorian and Edwardian period as one dominated by anxious and pessimistic

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[2] Lees, pp.12 and 233-8.

accounts of urban life, attitudes towards cities around the turn of the twentieth century are identified with fin-de-siècle anxieties about degeneration and decline, in which anxious elites yearned to retreat into the putative certainties of the rural past. Nostalgia for a Golden Age of agrarian simplicity, an 'organic society' of social harmony, has been read as a phenomenon indicative of the fundamentally anti-urban and anti-modern tendencies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century British culture. Conversely, attitudes of urbanity, cosmopolitanism, and aesthetic rapture with the modern city have often been compartmentalised as 'modernism'; the aesthetic experiments of self-consciously iconoclastic *avant-gardes*. But, as this thesis has argued, there was a widespread acknowledgement in the writings of novelists, social commentators, cultural critics, and urban planners that regress to the putative Golden Age of the pre-industrial past was an impossibility. Late Victorian and Edwardian culture was pervaded across the social scale by the acceptance that British society was, and would continue to be, predominantly urbanised. To be sure, many social observers expressed a deep sense of loss for modes of life and thought they associated with rural life, but, apart from a minority of 'back to the land' theorists, few argued that the solution was to de-urbanise or de-industrialise. Rather, the task was to re-harness industrial technologies towards efforts for social reform that would re-shape urban environments, and to infuse urban life with idealist values which would counter the utilitarian imperatives that had shaped industrial cities.

Late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards urban life are better characterised by intense ambivalence. Observers of urban life acknowledged the necessity of progressive social reform, and wished to re-direct the social and economic forces at play in the modern industrial city towards ideal ends. They expressed a sense that the social and economic transformations of the immediate past had happened largely without direction or purposive control; which had, in turn, wrought harm to cultural and emotional life. The task was now to 'clean up' the failures and deficiencies of the industrial revolution. As we saw in chapter six, social commentators and urban planners were in near-universal agreement that, if this were to be achieved, it would be by re-connecting cities *with* nature: through infusing the urban environment with *rus in urbe* amenities, and acknowledging the fundamental human need for beauty (whether this was envisaged in terms of creating beautiful architecture, or cultivating powers of aestheticised perception and appreciation among working-class urbanites).

Yet there was also, in late Victorian and Edwardian culture, a real sense of paralysis in the face of the enormity of the task – anxiety was induced by perceptions of the unprecedented

complexity of both urban problems and cities themselves. This intensified ambivalence and awareness of complexity was shaped, too, by an intensified awareness of plebeian lives. On the one hand this awareness induced misanthropy amongst novelists and social commentators – a reflex to assuage anxieties about a faceless and threatening urban crowd by envisaging them as a 'mass' characterised by fatuous acquiescence to the social order, or else as brutalised by urban poverty so that they came to think and feel less acutely. On the other, it shaped a new, modernistic awareness of the essential humanity of each individual, and of the vital inner, emotional lives of apparently commonplace working- and lower-middle-class urbanites.

This tension was felt, too, by working-class autobiographers who reflected upon the connection between their own subjectivities and those around them. Too much of our understanding of the experience of urban life, and the emotional adjustments entailed in the transition to urban modernity, derives from elite sources. Yet, as we have seen, working-class autobiographies can illuminate the 'view from below' of urban life around the turn of the twentieth century: providing a richly textured perspective on the emotional challenges of rural-urban migration, urban overcrowding, industrial employment, and the experience of poverty. Whilst many autobiographers expressed a strong feeling of being 'at home' within the urban crowd, and offered sympathetic and empathic conceptualisations of working-class life, other autobiographers reflected upon a deep sense of disconnection between their own emotional subjectivities and those around them, and recalled their anxiety amid the 'crowd'. This sometimes emerges as a form of snobbery, in which intellectually ambitious autodidacts conceived of their emotional lives as more uniquely intense than their fellow urbanites – who were felt to have unquestioningly accepted the privations of poverty, in contrast to autobiographers' own aspirations. But, more often, autobiographers' misanthropy emerges as an emotional coping mechanism that precluded intense anxiety and anguish at contemplating the extent of urban poverty: the millions of other individuals who each feel their own suffering acutely.

Late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards urban life have, most often, been understood through the lenses of intellectual and cultural history, in which emotions have been explored at the level of ideas, intellectual 'temperaments', and cultural representations, as opposed to a sphere of experience. Whilst earlier intellectual histories tended to emphasise attitudes of anxiety and pessimism in the writings of novelists and social commentators, more

recent cultural studies have focussed on the emotional diversity of urban representations, in which anxieties about degeneration and decline intermingled with perceptions of excitement and opportunity in the modern city, and a range of literary and artistic experimenters attempted to convey the dynamism and fluidity of modern urban life.[3] Yet these studies have generally employed what we might call a 'common sense' understanding of emotion, rather than a critical perspective on the nature of emotion. Historians have generally been interested in anxious assessments of urban life as a component of intellectual debates; the focus of this thesis has been on their emotional content, and upon the therapeutic functions of particular attitudes and emotions. The thesis has engaged with insights from the histories of the senses and emotions in order to provide a fuller understanding of emotional life around the turn of the twentieth century, and to get closer to the lived experience of individuals – in which ideas about cities and everyday experiences of urban space intersected, with each influencing the other.

Complex emotions were often narrated through everyday sensory interactions with the urban environment. As we saw in chapter two, social commentators' anxieties about the modern city crystallised around visual and aural perception, whilst the idealisation of rural life was associated with the psychologically soothing effects of touch, which physically connected individuals to their surroundings. I suggested, too, in chapter six, that whilst emotional encounters with urban space were often written in terms of revulsion from unpleasant sensory stimuli, experiences of nature were written in a register of assimilation and absorption, in which individuals' intersensory connections to the rural landscape produced a sense of the transcendent or sublime. On the one hand, paying close attention to the psychological and cultural construction of historical actors' sensory and emotional worlds reveals the ways in which complex emotions and ideas are often expressed (both implicitly and explicitly) through relatively simple sensory encounters with rural and urban space. On the other, it highlights how ideas about the country and the city come to be embodied within individuals, conditioning the ways in which they experience these environments.

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[3] For example, Nicholas Freeman, *Conceiving the City: London, Literature and Art 1870-1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

I have emphasised ambivalence in late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes towards cities, but I have not read it as simply a mixture of positive and negative emotions. Experiences of ambivalence and complexity were central to discourses of the modern city, through which a wide range of social actors articulated an awareness of living in changed times, in which feelings of loss and uncertainty coincided with an acknowledgement that regress to the putative certainties of the past was an impossibility. An approach informed by a critical awareness of emotion enables the historian to focus on the tensions, ambivalences, and paradoxes within attitudes towards cities and urban inhabitants: these contradictions are central to late Victorian and Edwardian experiences of urban life. We need to pay attention to the uncertainties, oscillations, inconsistencies, and, often, outright self-contradiction of historical actors and sources. And it is important not just to be sensitive to ambivalence and contradiction in sources, but also to interrogate the functions of this ambivalence. Historians and literary scholars have, for instance, often read the pervasive tone of misanthropy in literary high culture around the turn of the twentieth century as indicative of reflexive elitism and snobbery; part of a modernist crusade to exclude the 'masses' from intellectual culture. Yet, the emotional complexity of elite views about cities and mass society has been underexplored. As I argued in chapter five, we need to situate attitudes of misanthropy towards the urban working classes in the context of the emotional work that they performed.

Novelists, social commentators and working class-autobiographers alike both acknowledged the reflexive elitism of misanthropy for mass society, and explicitly reflected upon the failure of human sympathy that such attitudes represented; yet they frequently represented urban life in those same terms. They both acknowledged the falsity of an imagined golden age of rural simplicity, and asserted that industrialisation had destroyed it. They both worried over the frenetic pace, hurry, and restless activity of life in cities, and expressed deep anxieties about cultural stagnation and sterility. A psychoanalyst might point out that one only holds on to a series of contradictory beliefs because they serve a purpose lodged in the unconscious. One doesn't have to subscribe to psychoanalytic theories to suggest that nostalgic, misanthropic, and culturally pessimistic attitudes were held on to so determinedly because they performed therapeutic functions – these ideas were, in various ways, emotionally soothing. They resolved anxiety. In a real sense, views such as elite misanthropy, conservative rural nostalgia, and unequivocal cultural despair are psychologically comfortable positions, because they lie at the extremities of ideological certainty. In contrast, progressive and optimistic attitudes towards shaping the cities of the

future often rested upon a fine emotional balance, and a faith in society's abilities to purposively direct urban energies; a balance that was easily tipped towards visions of the loss of control. As I argued in chapter four, following David Edgerton's remark on the history of technological innovation, 'the price of artificial complexity' is 'eternal vigilance.'[4] The need to imagine both better urban technologies and infrastructure, on the one hand, and better ways of living, on the other, created a double burden that was itself productive of anxieties.

The thesis has also, in many ways, been about the late Victorian and Edwardian afterlives of Romanticism. I have used 'Romanticism' as a term that encompasses a cluster of related phenomena: at once referring to the reading of romantic literature; the idealisation of emotional intensity and aesthetic perception; the valorisation of nature; and, especially, the aestheticised enjoyment of the countryside, which envisaged the experience of nature in terms of the transcendent or sublime. In particular, I have used it to denote a cultural tradition rooted in a critique of the utilitarian and mechanistic values of industrialism; a sense that an increasingly urban and industrial society was threatening certain human values and qualities of living best embodied by both the arts, and the beauty and inspirations of nature.[5]

Social commentators such as Charles Masterman, G. M. Trevelyan, William Morris and Charles Ashbee; novelists such as E. M. Forster and Thomas Hardy; and nature writers such as Richard Jefferies and Edward Thomas rooted their critiques of urban life in a romantic view of English history and landscape, and through this they articulated a sense of loss, and anxieties about the human condition in the modern city. As I argued in chapters two and three, working-class autobiographers strongly identified with these romantic tropes and motifs – often explicitly embedding their experiences in, and relating them to, this intellectual inheritance. Yet Romanticism also provided a language that could be used to celebrate urban life: working-class observers frequently wrote of their rapture and excitement in the modern city in terms of enchantment, magic, and the romantic beauty of urban scenes. For rural-urban migrants, the bustle and pace of urban life could become synonymised with cultural and intellectual flourishing. Poets and novelists, too, wrote the city in romantic pastoral motifs, such as D. H. Lawrence's *The White Peacock*; or else envisaged modern technologies as heightening the appreciation of the sublime, as in W. H. Henley's celebration of the

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[4] David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2008) p.76.

[5] See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780—1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), pp.39-46.

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It may sound an obvious point, but love of nature and rejection of urban life are not co-extensive. Yet historians and literary scholars have, at times, taken the one as indicative of the other. In the late Victorian and Edwardian period, however, this romanticised cultural preoccupation with nature was, first and foremost, an *urban* one. Nature was idealised and reified most often by urbanites. For urban-born working-class autobiographers, for instance, first experiences of nature were predominantly written in terms of spiritual revelation and the discovery of beauty, which were often remembered as having formed the basis for adult subjectivities. We find a much more equivocal picture among the accounts of rural-urban migrants: some of whom expressed a sense of loss in the transition to urban life, whilst many wholeheartedly welcomed the pleasures and excitements of the city. Such authors explicitly rebuked the cultural idealisation of rural life – which focussed on picturesque country cottages, yet obscured the daily reality of agricultural poverty and toil for their inhabitants.

Indeed, it is significant that many novelists and nature writers who contrasted the disenchanting and disintegrating tendencies of urban life with the spiritualising beauty of nature themselves lived and worked in cities. Whilst Edward Thomas, for instance, styled his early nature essays and poetry in the model of Richard Jefferies' identity as 'Man of the Fields', he was born and brought up in suburban London.[6] Thomas' writings are infused with a sense of the countryside as an enchanted space *outside* daily experience. Indeed, as Lynne Hapgood writes, no more was Jefferies himself a 'Man of the Fields'. In Jefferies' nature writing, the countryside is a space of peaceful and leisurely contemplation, rather than one of manual labour in the open air. Jefferies grew up in the Wiltshire countryside, yet had no desire to work as an agricultural labour or farmer, and moved as an adult to the London suburb of Surbiton.[7] Moreover, late Victorian and Edwardian nature writers themselves wrote for a predominantly urban and suburban readership, who might either enjoy vicariously the pleasures of the countryside through imaginative literature, or take pocket editions with them on country walks or holidays.

Nostalgia for the natural world was not necessarily a regressive impulse to escape anxieties

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[6] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture, 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.71.
[7] Hapgood, p.87.

about urban life by retreating into fantasies of the imagined past; late Victorian and Edwardian nostalgia should instead be understood as a *constructive* response to urban anxieties. This was a compensatory kind of nostalgia, which accepted urbanity as the baseline, but sought occasional relief from it. Moreover, there was a widespread cultural consensus that urban problems and anxieties would not be countered so much by nature *per se*, as by the cultivation of certain privileged modes of life and thought which were most strongly associated with the experience of nature. Aestheticised perception, and an apprehension of the transcendent or sublime could also be fostered through the appreciation of literature and art. Nature, literature and art were envisaged as sources of beauty and spiritual meaning which might re-enchant an urban age.

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Mrs B.1.L

Mr and Mrs B.3.L

Mr B.4.P

Mrs B.5.P

Mr B.8.P

Mr C.1.P

Mr C.3.L

Miss C.4.P

Mr C.6.L

Mr E.1.P

Mr G.2.L

Mrs and Mrs G.4.P

Mrs H.2.L

Miss H.4.L

Mr H.6.P

Mr L.1.L

Mr L.1.P

Mrs M.6.L

Miss M.7.L

Mrs N.1.L

Mr and Mrs P.1.L

Mr P.2.L

Mr R.1.L

Mr and Mrs S.3.L

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Fuller, L. J. Mrs, C245

Gilbert, E. A., Mr. C258

Harmer, E., Mr., C268 and C269

Hearn, F., Mrs., C278

Houghton, B., Mr., C284

Jennings, H., Mrs., C288

Knight, A., Miss, C293

Marks, C., Mr., C302 and C303

Pack, F., Mr., C325, C326 and C327

Patterson, A., Mr., C332 and C333

Porter, T., Mr., C341

Pryor, R., Mr., C349

Rennells, A., Mr., C353

Terry, E. P. P., Mr., C384

Turner, V., Mrs, C391, C392 and C396

Twist, S., Mr., C398, C399 and C400

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