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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pamela Horn. *The Victorian Town Child.* New York: New York University Press, 1997. 248 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-3575-6.

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Published on H-Childhood (January, 1999)

Urban Voices, Victorian Childhoods

In the past two years, a wealth of new studies of Victorian childhood in Britain have appeared, each adding to a growing literature that enriches our knowledge of the realities of life for the young in nineteenth-century Britain. These social histories, most notably Anna Davin's *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* and Gretchen Galbraith's *Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books and Schools in Britain, 1870-1920*,[1] have focused on the late Victorian period and the role gender and class played in shaping children's experiences. Pamela Horn's most recent project, *The Victorian Town Child*, approaches the topic from a different angle. Her work aims at a larger synthesis of secondary and primary sources that explore the transformative power of urban industrial change on the lives of children from the early Victorian period to the 1890s. In short, she gives voice the children of Britain's urban past.

In this book, Horn develops a general overview of the transformation of urban life that accompanies nineteenth-century industrialization in Britain, and then places children in relationship to this rich town life that emerged between 1840 and 1900. She looks at the development of compulsory mass education, changing work and leisure patterns, and the importance of class to these developments. The book does a good job of incorporating recent regional studies of childhood, and it contains much useful statistical evidence. Her conclusion, which is also the final chapter of the book, explores the growth of rescue and welfare agencies by the end of the century, noting that this was a far cry from earlier treatment of children. For the most part, Horn relies on published reports, autobiographies and secondary sources, but she also consults oral history archives and local records offices for her materials.

Horn's lucid writing style and the wealth of illustrations in this book make it an enjoyable text, and the book should particularly appeal to general readers in the field. The author's main project is to illuminate broad trends and changes in Victorian society as it affected children's work, leisure, education, and home life–and in this general focus, she largely succeeds. Her contention that the Victorian period resulted in a new emphasis on the protection of the child through the growth of welfare societies, governmental programs and compulsory education is borne out. Likewise, Horn's emphasis on the changing nature of children's work and their increasing leisure time is also apparent. In short, Horn's book presents an overview of changes that many historians have been identifying in the last decade of research, but does so in a readable and clear format.

For scholars of Victorian Britain and of childhood, however, Horn's book may be frustrating simply because of its broad outlines. Horn does a good job of pulling in sources from areas around Britain (not just London) and in broadening her study to include a 50+ year period. In doing so, the author loses specificity and focus. For instance, in a discussion of middle-class behavioral standards, she mentions the importance of "keeping up appearances" (p. 21) without explaining what that implied and without delving into the cross-class complexities of this concept. In addition, Horn's evidence often feels anecdotal, especially when she presents an autobiographical account without mentioning when the story was supposed to have taken place. For example, in a discussion of truancy, Horn mentions a reference to Bristol children who used to "mooch off" school on a regular basis, but provides no other information (p. 88).

The other issue that will concern specialists in the field is the book's lack of an introduction, theoretical or otherwise, and its inadequate conclusion. Since the author plunges right into her discussion of the development of Victorian towns, readers get little understanding of the broad thesis of the book and no knowledge of the methodology employed in the study. The author also uses the work of many historians in explaining her

ideas on childhood, yet she does not incorporate any self-consciously historiographical sections in the book. Perhaps most troubling, however, is her lack of secondary works dealing specifically with class in the Victorian period. Noticeably absent are important works by Gareth Stedman Jones and Hugh McLeod, to name just a couple.[2]

Despite the sometimes frustrating lack of specificity, *The Victorian Town Child* is a short and engaging book that is particularly rich in published autobiographical sources, and it will be a welcome addition to general historical offerings on Britain.

Notes

[1]. Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram, 1997*) and Gretchen Galbraith,* Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books and Schools in Britain, 1870-1920_ (New York/London: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

[2]. See, for example: Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in Working-Class History, 1832-1982*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, (London: Croom Helm, 1974).

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Citation: Tammy M. Proctor. Review of Horn, Pamela, *The Victorian Town Child*. H-Childhood, H-Net Reviews. January, 1999.
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