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Martina Lauster. *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and Its "Physiologies," 1830-1850.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 366 pp. $85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-51803-2.

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The Ephemeral Sketch

Immensely popular during the 1830s and 1840s, sketches appear in retrospect to be a somewhat ephemeral and amorphous genre--probably the main reason that they have been underrated as a source of social, cultural, and political observation. Yet during this period they became a literary genre in their own right, often published in a serialized form as collections by different illustrative artists and writers, and typified by the city portrait as a theme.

The argument proposed in this study is that sketches--both in words and illustrations--form an important part of the network of knowledge at a time when seeing and knowing were intertwined. Indeed, as Martina Lauster, a scholar of nineteenth-century literature and professor of German at Exeter University in the United Kingdom, notes: "What places sketches in the centre of a visual-cognitive culture is their multiple nexus between the visible and the invisible; between observation and abstraction, entertainment and education, popular culture and science, journalism and high art, fragmentary and totalising views, commercial interest and the dissemination of encyclopaedic knowledge" (p. 1).

To explore that complex nexus, Lauster casts her net wider than the "journalism" she references in her title, including, for instance, the *Physiologies*, little books that inundated the Parisian book trade from 1840 until 1842, as well as serializations in periodicals, newspapers, wood engravings, and anthology (book) collections. As a result, the sheer scale of primary sources covered is impressive. Lauster inevitably returns to classics such as Charles Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* (1839), Edward Lytton Bulmer's *England and the English* (two volumes, 1833), and in the case of Germany, Eduard Beurmann's *Deutschland und die Deutschen* (four volumes,1838-40). Overall, though, the study clearly breaks new ground with a comparative analysis of fifty-six illustrations and an extensive list of texts from Britain (leader of the field), France (with an outstanding creative contribution), and Germany (with a contribution that is little known outside the country itself). And while Lauster's methodology is mainly confined to

textual and semiotic analysis, this book could prove a useful study for scholars of literary journalism and cultural studies as well as linguists and historians.

Chapters are organised thematically. In chapter 1 the author argues that sketches are an ephemeral form, engaged with "visual surfaces" and "journalistic print" in a particular way. They become a key generator of print culture and, at the same time, an "intellectual meta-medium," so we are told (p. 33). All well and good, except that the case is presented without any explanation of trends in press development. The interpretations of scholars who provide a broad-brush approach to the political economy of international journalism history, such as Anthony Smith (1979), Asa Briggs and Peter Bourke (2005), and Jane Chapman (2005) would have provided some context for press development. Equally, encyclopedic collections such as editors Claude Bellanger et. al (1969) on French newspapers could have provided a reference point for statistical and factual background.

The subtitle of this study, "European Journalism and its *Physiologies*" invites context. To be sure, we are given plenty of analysis on the rather difficult concept of *physiologies* (emergent interest in all things physical and scientific) but not on European journalism, about which the reader will be none the wiser. We never learn why or how newspapers were produced, by whom, for what purpose, or in what quantities, although both the back cover summary and the first line of the introduction refer to "the journalistic revolution." What exactly constituted this "journalistic revolution" of the 1830s and 1840s? Was it technological (production of newspapers), or cultural and political (attitudes, changing readerships), or economic (foundations of commercialism), or all three? We are never told. How does this period compare to other contenders for the title of "journalistic revolution," such as the eighteenth century with its coffee shops and pamphleteering enthusiasms, or indeed to the period of the first "new journalism" during the latter part of the nineteenth century when mass readerships became a reality in both Europe and America? By the second chapter, "Sketches and Optical Methodology," it becomes clear that Lauster is more comfortable with a literary studies approach and textual analysis than with journalism history. Here Charles Dickens's ***Pictures from Italy*** (1846), Honoré de Balzac's "Histoire et physiologie des Boulevards de Paris" in ***Le Diable à Paris*** (two volumes, 1845-6), Eduard Beurmann's panorama of Frankfurt (1835), and August Lewald's panorama of Munich (two volumes, 1835), are referred to collectively as "optical media" in order to illustrate a rather fine idea of "microscopic viewing"--a cognitive tool for readers. This refers to a process whereby literary sketches were constantly used to stimulate the viewer's visual imagination, as a "Rapid Diorama"--the title of a chapter from the Dickens volume above. The idea is to present different layers of time. These days the moving image provides a comparable function, but usually in a less intellectually challenging way.

The proposition that physical factors and the paradigm of the emerging discipline of life science is critical to the sketch phenomenon is robustly presented in chapter 3, entitled "Physiology, Zoology and the Constitution of Social Types." (Balzac's grocer, "L' Épicier," first appearing in 1830, then republished twice in 1839 as part of an eight-volume collection of French self-portraits, is perhaps the best exemplar of middle-class self-scrutiny.) The author then turns to literary analysis of the contemporary moral order in sketches that reference the myth of Asmodeus--a devil on crutches, who repays his gratitude for being released from a bottle by taking away the roofs of houses in Madrid so that his liberator can see what is happening inside all of the city. This fascinating voyeuristic, moralistic thread culminates in the fusion of physical and panoramic observa-

tions in chapters 5 and 6, but actually has potential for a discrete study in its own right.

Chapter 7 examines "The Encyclopaedic Order" as applied to the nation and the nineteenth century more generally, touching on the important nineteenth-century fashion for collection, in this case information.

For all its reach, though, Lauster's study falls short in significant ways. The more difficult sketches are to locate and define (and they are difficult in both ways), the more it should be necessary to contextualize within the scholarship of journalism history. Instead, the author assumes the role of David versus Goliath, prioritizing an ambitious challenge to critic Walter Benjamin's pioneering ideological interpretation of the Parisian *flâneur* and the *Physiologies* in his much-quoted "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" (1938) as a phenomenon of middle-class aspirations to power in an age of incipient modernity. Thus, the introduction presents the "problem" of his legacy, but the overall effect of the study is to leave his seminal reputation only marginally bruised. Indeed, the book's conclusion, which argues the case for sketches as a grammar of modernity, is more concerned with disproving Benjamin than it is with acknowledging other more recent contributions to the social theory of media and modernity, such as John B. Thompson's classic *Media and Modernity* (1995).

If one adopts the historian's broader gaze and longer view, the very challenge of this study should be to place a hitherto ill-defined body of written and illustrative historical work within a specific historic context, while offering an in-depth comparative analysis of representational styles and practices. We get the latter but not the former. Failure to reflect on the 1848 revolutions, the march of the first industrial revolution in Britain, the nexus of liberalism and national unification in Germany and mainland Europe, the impact of utopian socialism in France, and the significance of the publication of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) are all crucial. Even a non-Marxist will admit that this period *par excellence* witnessed the synthesis of socioeconomic and political thought as a tool kit for understanding the pace and nature of change, and sketches form part of the available empirical evidence. But appreciation of this context is sacrificed for a revisionist targeting of Benjamin that fails to tackle the associated political economy approach--nascent during the 1830s and 1840s and itself the back drop to Benjamin's thinking.

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