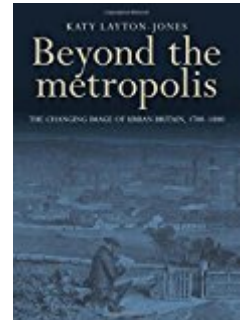


Katy Layton-Jones. *Beyond the Metropolis: The Changing Image of Urban Britain, 1780-1880.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7190-9969-4.



Reviewed by Jules P. Gehrke

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Commissioned by David T. Benac (Western Michigan University)

Katy Layton-Jones offers a cogent analysis of a remarkable period of transition for British cities from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. She argues that printed images, including those in periodicals and travel guides as well as those in a range of other popular forums, offer a nuanced means of understanding how late Georgian and early Victorian observers sought to shape images of their expanding industrial cities and the local geographic, historical, and cultural contexts into which these cities were woven. Her work eschews London, choosing to tap into rich visual sources outside of London and to avoid being trapped by the bias toward “high art” images of the capital (p. 9). Layton-Jones has already introduced many of the themes she addresses in this book to both popular and academic audiences.[1] But in ranging across industrial cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham, and Sheffield, and connecting the work here with detailed analysis she has already conducted on Manchester (particularly the Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857), she offers a rich monograph likely to be

most widely discussed for the primacy offered to visual source analysis.

For both cultural and environmental historians, “views” of towns—as depicted in travel literature, provincial publications, and ephemera—are the key component of Layton-Jones’s work. She unpacks the compositional elements of the “distant view,” noting how town views emphasized historic or cultural landmarks early in the century and often downplayed changes emerging with the spread of urbanization and industrialization. Soon, however, inherited townscapes were leavened with the smokestacks and outlines of factories, seen by many of the artists as woven into the fabric of local commercial and cultural life; the thrust of her work thus suggests that the bifurcated notion of the industrial city bequeathed by the Victorian era is in need of significant revision. For Layton-Jones, visual evidence of the early nineteenth century provides critical evidence of how provincial observers viewed the economic and cultural potential of their cities. She examines the efforts of local officials to reshape images of their

regions with experiences as diverse as panoramas and exhibitions of arts and manufacture that championed their distinct identities and aspirations. In the Great Exhibition of 1851, followed by the London International Exhibition of 1862, provincial cities came to understand the power of displays that placed an industry or craft at the very center of specific cities' existences. Among the exhibitions soon planned by individual towns and cities, the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857 sought to amalgamate the town's industrial reputation with the capacity of its institutions and leaders to bring art and culture to the masses. "Rather than presenting displays ... which would reinforce the industrial caricature of manufacturing towns, Manchester instead hosted a cultural spectacle that attracted thousands of non-commercial travellers.... The Art Treasures Exhibition claimed culture as well as commerce as a central feature of the new urban giants" (p. 83). Layton-Jones writes that the challenge of fashioning civic and industrial harmony in the early nineteenth century was demonstrated in a number of diverse efforts. These included those of civic leaders who attempted to reconcile understandings of commercial advancement and the need for a healthy environment in their writing, and the work of artists who continued to amalgamate views of the "hinterland" and "townscape" in their images: "At no time did urban improvement constitute a universal attempt to negate or eradicate the features that had fueled the growth and wealth of provincial urban Britain.... This reveals something striking about attitudes to urbanisation prior to the emergence of the dystopian, Babylonian caricature in the closing decades of the nineteenth century; the 'urban renaissance,' although altered in form and location, continued in spirit, and the urban project remained the defining feature of the nation's social, cultural, political, and economic complexion" (p. 116).

Layton-Jones investigates the image of the provincial city that emerged through early nineteenth-century advertising, noting how "advertis-

ers" and local trade directories might have situated factories amid rural surroundings, thus responding to traditional aesthetic norms, or attempted to associate a current manufacturing enterprise with the heritage of a region. Images of industrial facilities made their way onto carefully crafted mementos containing vignettes through which idealized forms of a factory or commercial enterprise could be transmitted. Layton-Jones concludes with a look at the imagery in the dramatic depictions of conflict and destruction that could emerge with political upheaval at the local level. Here, she suggests that images depicting violence or conflict were characterized by a localism emphasizing both the cities and people as sites of explosive change. These images, such as the ruins created by the Bristol fires, she writes, "might be portentous, but they do not yet exhibit the unmitigated anxiety that suffused *fin-de-siècle* imagery" (p. 171).

Layton-Jones offers a substantive contribution to considering how the stories of Victorian cities, when examined through the visual artifacts constructed by their observers, may be richer and more complex—and less stark—than recent historiography has suggested. Her work is unlikely to overturn what she identifies as "the well-rehearsed position of much recent scholarship," but nonetheless will form a part of the conversation (p. 5). In this conversation, the book's structure will leave some readers seeking chronological footing amid shifting thematic focuses that in individual chapters each draw on varying caches in a wider visual archive. Nonetheless, Layton-Jones's work here captures and magnifies the significance of a new emphasis on visual imagery, and its interpretation, that is central to her ongoing work.

Note

[1]. For academic audiences, see, for instance, Katy Layton-Jones, "Re-presenting Manchester: Printed and Ephemeral Images of the Art-Treasures Exhibition," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Li-*

brary 87, no. 2 (August 2009): 123-142; and Katy Layton-Jones, "The Synthesis of Town and Trade: Visualizing Provincial Urban Identity, 1800-1858," *Urban History* 35, no. 1 (2008): 72-95.

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