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Book review

Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation. 2015. UK, Palgrave Macmillan. (£58.00 (Hardback) ISBN: 978-1-137-54546-6 £55.10 (ebook) ISBN: 978-1-137-54547-3)

For the trans port historian keen to understand impetus for and modes, patterns and consequences of travel in the distant past, a lack of data may seem limiting. One solution may be to draw on sources of data such as contemporary diaries or letters, where these are available. However, for quotidian, unproblematic journeys, the mechanics of travel might seldom be introduced in life writing (for a full discussion of this topic, see Colin Pooley's paper on using life writing as data[1]). In order to address a gap in contemporary knowledge of common travel practices in past times one strategy is to treat the novel as a source of data. This book addresses the potential of the Victorian novel to yield information on different types and consequences of mobility. However, the scope of Charlotte Mathieson's work goes beyond a study of Victorian travel: to read this book is to explore a potential interface between transport Geography and Mobility studies.

The book is wide-ranging. Mobility in the Victorian age is studied, through six free-standing sections, each of which is available to buy separately from the publishers. The Introduction sets out a definition of mobility where movement takes on significance, not because of anything intrinsic to the journey itself, such as distance or purpose, but because of the meanings, and by implication the consequences of these journeys at individual through to global levels. The following chapters tease out, in different contexts and modes of travel, the significance of particular types of journey and mobilities. In well-referenced and quite unambiguous discussions Chapter 1 covers Walking and Chapter 2 addresses Railway travel. Recent events have given Chapter 3 a perhaps unexpected topicality, covering as it does travel beyond Britain to the continent of Europe. The author notes (page 87) "In Europe, travel becomes an experience of bodily unease.....contributing to structural networks of mobility that register unease about [the continent] and its growing proximity to Britain". She concludes however that this should be read as a "positive and inevitable force". Finally, Chapter 4 turns to travelling beyond Europe, where Mathieson defines global influences as a positive force. Readers of this book may find that many of the political debates of today build on structures that were put in place in the Victorian age.

Mathieson makes use of a range of sources, demonstrating, with reference to a canon of literature whose authors include Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, how the extension of travel affected not only physical landscapes but individuals and societies. Exploring testimonies of travel on foot or of utilising the developing networks of roads and railways the book extends to a discussion of how a cycle of national change was set in motion by the emergence of new and improved means of becoming mobile, travellers no longer dependent solely on the physical capacity of their own bodies in order to move beyond familiar environments. In her examination of the diversification of travel opportunities and the greater availability of modes of transport such as rail, Charlotte Mathieson examines how travel itself became a catalyst for changes within a nation where boundaries, both spatial and sociological, expanded or were undermined by the opportunities afforded by increased mobility. Mobility became an agent of change, a catalyst capable of magnifying scale. In this context she analyses how increased use of print in a fast-evolving nation extended the role of the Post Office in circulating printed materials, working to improve road networks (page 4) which, in turn, helped create a 'national discourse network'. The book explores how physical mobility facilitated travellers' understanding of other parts of the country, or nation, and hints at social mobilities opened up by a shift in the purpose of travel from a necessity to an activity taken at leisure.

'Placing the nation', part of the book's title, begs a question left unanswered in its pages. What is the nation to which the author refers? In her Conclusion, she writes '…it is England where the networking effects of modern mobility were most extensive and where the novels studied here locate their idea of the nation' (page 159); yet her focus on England detracts from the strength of her argument that it was a nation rather than a country that underwent change through mobility. It was Queen Victoria who established the Highlands of Scotland as a destination of choice for royalty, which encouraged her subjects to travel in this area, prompting physical and cultural change both within Scotland and England. A reading of contemporary Scottish writers such as Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson would reward those keen to explore aspects of internal and external mobility in a developing Scottish nation which, in turn, had an impact not only on its neighbours in the United Kingdom but on other countries throughout Europe and beyond. However, each chapter is tightly argued and minutely referenced and the scope of the book is such that the reader may be encouraged to move beyond the authors discussed in its pages to extend some of its themes to an exploration of the works of other writers.

Both scholarly in tone and lively in delivery and scope, this stimulating book can be read at several levels. Through its introduction to strategies in interrogating the pages of a novel for information on mobility patterns, it makes a welcome addition to the tool kit available to the transport geographer seeking to develop an understanding of the history of travel. It also invites the reader to move beyond the narratives provided in fiction to explore connections between the themes identified in their pages and the wider issues of the causes and effects of increased mobility. However, straddling as it does fictional accounts of journeys and embodied meanings, it raises the question at what point Transport Geography morphs into Mobilities. While this discussion is well beyond the scope of a book review, some readers from a Transport Geography

[1] Cities, spaces and movement: everyday experiences of urban travel in England c. 1840–1940. Urban History, available on CJO2016. doi:10.1017/S0963926816000031.

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background might find some of the content of the book to be arcane and beyond their interests. However, no matter what one's purview, Charlotte Mathieson's work is to be recommended for its lively and well-argued treatment of some fascinating themes.

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