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Karen Newman, *Cultural Capitals. Early Modern London and Paris*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007. 224 pp. \$45.00 (cl). ISBN 10-069-11275-49.

Review by David Garrioch, Monash University.

Despite its title, this is not a work of history. It is a literary study by an author who is deeply interested in history, who reads widely in the historical literature, and who has some perceptive observations to make about the approaches adopted by historians. It offers some brilliant analysis of the kind only the best literary scholars can produce, but it is not concerned with historical questions. The “culture” of the title is above all literary culture, but it is deliberately elastic, in some parts of the book encompassing the broader kinds of urban culture described by Raymond Williams or Walter Benjamin, and sometimes it refers to the elite consumer culture of the early modern period. Newman states in the introduction that “the book seeks to show how London and Paris become the overdetermined cultural capitals they became by the eighteenth century”, and her central preoccupation is the way that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Paris and London, because of their particular demographic, economic, social and political characteristics, produced literary works that contain features characteristic of modernity. Strangely—for a theoretically aware literary scholar—Newman does not define “modernity”, except as “ways of thinking, believing, and acting that we have come to call modern” (p. 5). Nevertheless, she concludes that “if what we term *modernity* is to be found in the early modern city and its cultural remains, perhaps . . . how *modernity* [emphases in original] is conceptualized needs to be rethought” (p. 7).

Each chapter is devoted to a particular theme in urban history that is then linked to one or more works of literature, broadly defined. The first two chapters deal with representations of the early modern city. Chapter one starts with Chantelou’s account of Bernini’s visit to Paris in the mid 1660s[1], and through considering the literary device of the *promenade* shows the connections between Bernini’s ‘metropolitan sensibility’ and that evident in the Dick Whittington stories and in the surveys and guidebooks of the same period. The second chapter continues this theme, moving from travel guides to engravings, broadsides, and finally to the verse of Nicolas Boileau and François Bertaut, with a look sideways (disconcerting to the historian) at some of the letters of Freud. These two chapters have much to offer urban historians and literary scholars alike, not least through their erasure of the common distinction between literary and ‘historical’ sources. All can be read as emanations of a particular metropolitan culture, both produced by and constructing understandings of the urban environment.

The third chapter applies the insights of writing on nineteenth-century cities, notably the theme of the *flâneur* and the urban gaze, to a range of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poems, particularly John Donne’s satires. Here the target is very firmly the analysis of these works by literary scholars, though once again Newman is concerned to link them to the particular demographic conditions of the early modern city and the appearance of new notions of urban social and geographical mobility—the chapter ends with a discussion of the spread of carriages in London and Paris.

Essentially the same techniques are used in the sections that follow. One on “Filth, Stench, Noise” explores the way the contemporary Parisian preoccupation with mud and sewage, evident in travel

accounts, is used in urban satires by Antoine Furetière, then analyses Ben Jonson's use of urban noise. The link, courtesy of Norbert Elias's idea of the civilizing process, is shame, provoked in both literary examples by urban life and its patterns of sociability and civility. The fifth chapter goes on to draw some interesting connections between courtship and literary/luxury consumption in engravings, urban verse, and—in more detail—in little-known comedies by Pierre Corneille. Corneille was attacked for using the city as a backdrop for his plays, but the urban context, Newman shows, was crucial to understanding their social and sexual politics.

Space is again the key theme in subsequent chapters on travel as cultural capital and on memorials. Women were largely excluded from travel in the seventeenth century, but the novel provided them with an alternative form of access to the knowledge and—to a limited degree—the power that this form of cultural capital produced. Not surprisingly, Madeleine de Scudéry's writing takes pride of place, set in a variety of exotic locations and using travel allegorically in the *carte de Tendre*. The chapter on memorials focuses first on John Stow's *Survey of London* (1598), noting its concern with monuments and antiquities, then moves to some other works that also have memorializing as a key theme. The links to both the city and modernity are, in this case, less obvious. On the one hand there is a preoccupation with death arising from high urban mortality rates. On the other, "memorialization depends on accumulation, and marks a shift from the authority of names to the authority of numbers" (p. 132). Merchants' account books were sometimes called 'memorials'.

The final chapter, with the promising title "Sex in the City", attacks the distinction made between literary texts and archival records. Court records dealing with prostitution are formulaic and full of gaps, reflecting dominant ideologies and legal conventions, and for that reason offer little access to lived experience. Texts like Thomas Nashe's late sixteenth-century manuscript poem "A Choise of Valentines", on the other hand, tell us far more about urban and sexual experience. The 'archive fever' that has recently infected literary studies is therefore, Newman suggests, misplaced and unlikely to advance the discipline. The history of urban subjectivity, she concludes provocatively, is not to be found in archives.

This is a historian's review of a literary study. The chapter-by-chapter survey implicitly looks for a narrative and for a conclusion, and the book offers neither. It is the journey that matters, not the destination. The overarching themes will be clear from my summary, but each chapter is rich in passing observations. (My favourite is the comment that historians have paid little attention to the proliferation of chairs in Paris apartments, and to the implications of this for reading practices and salon culture—pp. 117-119.) Overall, the book is centrally concerned with some key debates among literary scholars. Newman is keen to defend the 'new historicism', but to save it from misrepresentation and misuse. She questions traditional divisions between genres, and her analysis certainly crosses both the conventional boundaries between verse and novels, tragedy and comedy, but also between travel accounts and novels, fiction and urban description. She also offers a model for comparative literary studies, using the idea of metropolitan culture to move away from an exclusive focus on works produced within a single language or national tradition. This argument is weakened a little by the fact that some themes are studied only with reference to Paris, others only to London. Nevertheless, she does succeed in demonstrating some fascinating links between the urban environment and literary production, and it is this focus that will be of interest to many early modern historians.

## NOTES

[1] Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France* (Saint-Jean-de-Braye: Macula l'Insulaire, 2001)

David Garrioch  
Monash University

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