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Matthew L. Reznicek, *The European Metropolis: Paris and Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Novelists*. Clemson, S.C. and Liverpool: Clemson University Press, in association with Liverpool University Press, 2017. v + 224 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$117,87. ISBN: 978-1-942954-32-3.

Review by Marguërite Corporaal, HLCS, Radboud University Nijmegen.

Jean Béraud's painting *Parisian Street Scene* (1885; Metropolitan Art Museum, New York) foregrounds a fashionably dressed young woman perusing a poster-covered kiosk, wrapped up in the act of reading covers of advertised magazines. To her right there is an elegant, bearded man who appears to gaze in her direction. Another man, partially hidden behind the kiosk, admiringly takes in the woman's radiant beauty. It is no wonder, perhaps, that the lady receives so much attention from these two male bystanders, for she is the only woman shown in the painting. The people in the background that traverse the city, by coach or on foot, are all men belonging to the upper strata of society, involved in conversation or on their way to destinations elsewhere in the metropolis.

Béraud's artwork conveys the centrality of Paris, as the bustling metropolis, in the cultural imagination of nineteenth-century France, and reminds one of similar urban scenes painted by his contemporaries Émile Meunier, Gustave Caillebotte and Edgar Degas, or depicted by Honoré Balzac in *Le Père Goriot* (1835), by Jules and Edmond de Goncourt in *Germinie Lacerteux* (1867) and by Émile Zola in *Thérèse Raquin* (1867).

Reznicek's rich monograph *The European Metropolis* uses Béraud's painting as its cover. It discusses relevant works by Balzac and Zola about the individual's encounter with and development in Paris, and references "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), the famous essay by Charles Baudelaire that introduced the concept of the *flâneur*, the detached spectator of city life who is at home in its crowds. This study moves beyond conventional paradigms in research on the nineteenth-century metropolis in two significant respects: through its focus on the ways in which women writers have represented the individual's understanding of the cityscape, and through its concern with the ways Paris was imagined by women writers elsewhere in Europe.

During the 1990s and 2000s research emerged that specifically focused on the position of nineteenth-century women in the metropolis. Works by Judith Walkowitz, Sally Ledger and Deborah Parsons, among others<sup>[1]</sup> have looked at media representations of women in the metropolis and women's use of urban public spaces such as the department store, as well as the concept of the "flâneuse," as an alternative to Baudelaire's masculine observer of city life.<sup>[2]</sup> In line especially with Ledger's and Parsons's studies, which explored the ways in which London in particular features in fiction by female authors such as Ella Hepworth-Dixon, Virginia Woolf, and Sarah Grand, Reznicek's monograph examines representations of the (often female) traveller to Paris and this character's identity formation in the city in works by Irish women: Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin Ross, Katherine Cecil Thurston, and Kate O'Brien.

Reznicek incorporates a sophisticated theoretical framework consisting of Judith Butler's idea of the performance of gender identity, Michel de Certeau's concept of "urban legibility," that is, a person's capacity to understand the dynamics of the metropolis, and Georg Simmel and Franco Moretti's reconfigurations of the *Bildungsroman* "through the lens of economics" (p. 9). Through his close readings of these Irish women writers' fiction about (often foreign) travellers to Paris, Reznicek convincingly argues that Irish female authors express an awareness of the unequal opportunities that the metropolis offers to various social groups, and especially to women. Their female protagonists' failures to climb the social ladder, reach ambitions, or achieve the socialisation that *Bildungsromane* usually conclude on, are often pitted against male characters' success in urban mobility, even if they are originally of lower class than the heroines.

This is, Reznicek states, the case in *French Leave* (1928), a novel by cousins Edith Sommerville and Violet Martin Ross. Upper-class Patsey Kirwen's attempt to succeed as an artist in Paris is ill-fated, due to her lack of access to the marketplace and financial means of her own, unlike George Lester, who, despite being a tenant farmer's son, can easily find his place in the capitalist system and achieve artistic fame. As Reznicek thus shows, the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* set in the metropolis should primarily be interpreted as a genre concerned with identity formation in the context of economic realities and socioeconomic geographies. Furthermore, his very compelling reading of Katherine Cecil Thurston's *Max* (1910)—a narrative featuring a crossdressing heroine who seeks to make it in the city as a man—reveals that these writings by Irish women about Paris respond to Baudelairian concepts of spectatorship. They situate their female protagonists as both objects and subjects of the gaze—in ways similar to the elegant lady in Béraud's painting who is both a spectacle and an observer taking in the city scene herself.

In discussing issues of female authorship and gender, Reznicek's research takes two significant new directions. First, his work is unique in examining Irish women's literary imaginations of Paris over a long period of time stretching from Romanticism to early Modernism. As such, he manages to situate these women writers' works in a variety of changing contexts, showing how they respond to Burkean anxieties over the French revolution, the popularity of "panoramic literature," and the rise of the New Woman, the emancipated female who seeks to develop her talents and who rejects the conventional path of marriage and motherhood (p. 122).

Second, he includes relatively unknown works by these Irish women writers, whose oeuvre has mainly been studied in connection to relations between landlords and tenantry or the genre of the "national tale": texts which comment on the political union between England and Ireland through allegorical narratives featuring the marriage between a male member of the English Ascendancy and a native Irish woman.<sup>[3]</sup> Thus while writings by Owenson, Edgeworth, and Sommerville and Ross in particular have primarily been identified with plots focusing on romance, marriage, and the domestic, Reznicek demonstrates that these nineteenth-century authors engaged with topics, genres, and settings that would conventionally be associated with male writers: reflections on modernity, the individual's capacity for social mobility and self-development, life in the metropolis, and the genre of the *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*. Aiming "to rectify this critical gap" in scholarship about these authors, Reznicek inadvertently calls for a reassessment of women's writing and its position in literary traditions and canons (p. 26).

What is probably most valuable about Reznicek's research is that he opens various areas of expertise to innovative, transnational perspectives. For one thing, he adds an Irish vantage point to our knowledge of how nineteenth-century Paris was imagined and his provocative readings show how these texts envisage cross-cultural impact between the French metropolis and the Irish countryside. Thus Maria Edgeworth's eponymous hero in *Ormond* (1817) becomes a more sensible and responsible landlord in Ireland due to his formative years in Paris, while unrest in Ireland means that Paris is a haven of refuge for Murrough O'Brien in Sydney Owenson's *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys* (1827).

At the same time, *The European Metropolis* refreshingly demonstrates that the Irish nineteenth-century

novel is not only about land issues and Irish politics, but is engaged with cosmopolitanism, and can be placed within a framework of continental European literature. Reznicek draws comparisons between the novels by Irish women writers and works by Goethe, Balzac, and Diderot, thereby showing Irish literature's interactions with other European traditions and moving beyond the tendency in Irish studies to restrict comparative research to diasporic literary traditions: Irish-American, Irish-Australian, or Irish-Canadian literature, for example.

It must be noted that Franco-Irish cultural and literary relations have gained prominence in recent years, specifically in research carried out by Eamon Maher, Catherine Maignant and Grace Neville.[4] Reznicek's study fits in with these current developments in scholarship. Furthermore, Reznicek's monograph, with its attention to novels about New Women travelling to Paris, perfectly complements Tina O'Toole's pioneering study of the Irish New Woman, which in its final chapter on the transnational New Woman mainly focuses on literary case studies in relation to London and New York.[5]

While Reznicek brings up many novel perspectives, there are also some loose threads, in the sense of inevitable questions that his study raises and that can outline future research directions. *The European Metropolis* is very much a literary study, and few historical or any other contemporary sources are cited to contextualise these novelistic representations of Paris. It is likely that these Irish women writers were also inspired by travel narratives, for example, and, especially as of the mid-century, illustrated periodicals and their imaginations of Parisian urban scenes.[6]

Examining media representations and literature in dialogue may shed further light on processes of cultural transfer operating between France and Ireland, especially since many images travelled across national borders and made it into the press elsewhere. Furthermore, the recurring plotline of a young Irish emigrant girl relocating to the metropolis that one finds in both nineteenth-century Irish and Irish North-American novels[7] elicits the question of how these representations of the North-American metropolis compare to those of Paris. *The European Metropolis* fills many scholarly gaps, and at the same time points to potential areas of investigation that will broaden the horizons of both Irish and French studies.

## NOTES

[1] See Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); and Deborah Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[2] Ledger, *The New Woman*, pp. 150-53.

[3] For further reading on the national tale, see for example Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Thomas Tracy, *Irishness and Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); and Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790-1829* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[4] See Eamon Maher and Catherine Maignant, eds., *Franco-Irish Connections in Space and Time* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012); and Eamon Maher and Grace Neville, eds., *Franco-Ireland: Anatomy of a Relationship* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004).

[5] Tina O'Toole, *The Irish New Woman* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 129-48.

[6] From the mid-nineteenth century, so-called weeklies and monthlies came in many forms, ranging

from periodicals that served special interests, literary magazines, satirical journals, and titles that provided journalistic reports of regional, national and international events to the more miscellaneous periodicals that combined news with entertainment. One type of periodical that gained prominence after the establishment of the *Illustrated London News* in 1842 was the illustrated periodical, which combined journalism with visual images, usually in the form of wood engravings. French equivalents were *L'Illustration* and *Le Monde Illustré*. See, for example, S.G. Cooke, *Illustrated Periodicals of the 1860s* (Middlesex: Private Libraries Association, 2010).

[7] Examples are Peter McCorry's *The Lost Rosary* (Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1870) and Mrs J. Sadlier's *Bessy Conway; or, the Irish Girl in America* (New York: D. and J. Sadlier, 1862).

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