CHAPTER TWO

Desarts of Africa or Arabia

*The needy villains’ gen’ral home*

As a first stage in the exploration of progress and its antitheses I wish to focus on the problem of metropolitan poverty. We now have a reasonably secure understanding of its structural underpinnings in the modern era. Dorothy George’s *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, written some seventy-six years ago, remains unsurpassed as an account of the socio-economic conditions of the poorer classes. More recently, Gareth Stedman Jones has described influentially the locus of the casual poor in the late nineteenth-century metropolis, while more quantitative approaches have been used by Leonard Schwarz to explore economic fluctuations in the metropolitan economy up to 1850, and by David Green to assess the impact of economic change on poverty from 1790 to 1870.

And yet we have a rather imprecise and highly selective grasp of how the poor were actively constructed as an object of concern. Recently scholarly work on the discursive landscape of the nineteenth-century metropolitan poor has identified epistemological shifts, thought variously as from pauperism to poverty, rationalist hedonism to social Darwinism, individual to societal, demoralization to degeneration. As abstract typologies expressing elite concerns around citizenship, poverty, political order and a range of social pathologies they are useful, but their selectivity masks real complexities and impedes a broader appreciation of the ways in which the metropolitan poor came to occupy an extraordinary centrality in the bourgeois imagination. To achieve this we need to go beyond government reports compiled by people well removed from their object of inquiry, and beyond fiction, which for most of the nineteenth century did not address the poor. Rather, semi-factual accounts written by urban travellers and evangelicals exerted the formative influence on how the poor were perceived among all sections of Victorian society, not least because they could lay claim to privileged access to the cultural and physical
environment inhabited by the poor. These writers lived amongst, conversed with and moved around the metropolitan poor to produce an impressive range of tracts, articles and books that were widely disseminated and read. The more popular accounts went through many editions. They appeared in different forms, were plagiarized, and were frequently cited in parliament, in some instances prompting legislative reform. They displayed an acute sensitivity to the moral and political concerns of the time – concerns that they in turn effectively shaped.5

The metropolitan poor, I wish to argue, were ‘discovered’ through their discursive creation as an object of concern and inquiry. This appropriation and subsequent reworkings were neither incidental nor insignificant. Upon them was erected the entire edifice of Victorian social and moral reform directed at the amelioration of poverty and its consequences. And these matters reached beyond the domestic, for much of the reform has to be seen within the context of the British imperial formation. The racialization of the poor, for example, which began in mid century and intensified during the 1860s and 1880s, was in terms of its chronology, narrative and rhetoric so similar to constructions of colonial others that they can be seen as shared and mutually reinforcing responses to deep anxieties about the future of the imperial race. To understand fully the distinctive nature of the moral universe that embraced the metropolitan poor, it is necessary to trace its lineages.

The literary expression of the metropolis has a complex history.6 London emerged as a major urban centre in the nation’s life from the early fifteenth century. Herein was concentrated an absolutist state wielding the power of an aristocracy whose origins could be traced to an old feudal order but which was now under increasing threat from a nascent mercantilist and industrial bourgeoisie, and from a migrant and dispossessed population of apprentices, casual labourers and vagrants drawn to the suburbs of London by the opportunities offered for gainful – but not necessarily productive – employment. The dissembling processes created by this urbanization could not be encompassed by the neo-feudal literary modes of church and court; instead there emerged a rich, transgressive literature which sought to articulate tensions within the new moral and spatial landscapes.

In the years from 1580 to 1620, London witnessed an extraordinary literary renaissance. Located in a period of transition between a late medieval order and an ascendant mercantilism, a large and diverse body of ballads, chapbooks, canting verse, pamphlets and plays was published which, in expressing discrepancies between traditional and new, elite and popular, court and urban, embodied secular images of the changing metropolitan landscape. Its most notable exponents were John Awdeley, Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker. In this rogue literature,
ethical alternatives were offered to traditional authority through ‘an endorsement of mobility, a cultivation of bohemianism and aggressive individuality, a new sense of “crisis” and temporality geared to the rhythms of economic exchange, and a tendency to naturalize the frightening sense of change associated with London’.7

Remote from patronage and establishment, subject to the vicissitudes of the publishing market, the liminal status of these authors made possible experiential modes of inquiry into previously unexplored areas of London life. Marginalized and subordinate realms associated with the street were brought centre stage and hence revealed. The preferred mode was travelogue and repentance. With an authority derived from dissolute lives, these writers ‘discovered’ the criminal underworld of Tudor London. The series of popular beggar books, canting lexicons and cony-catching pamphlets not only elaborated taxonomies of villainy and trickery – even giving voice to the rogues themselves – but by extension exposed the fraudulent nature of all those associated with the marketplace.8 Descent into the underworld becomes an act of personal and public renewal.

The reception of such literature in large part depended upon its ability to articulate and offer reassuringly practical resolutions to the host of moral and physical tensions that beset the metropolis. Pamphlets sold at a time when novel urban pathologies such as crime, vagrancy, disease and acquisitiveness entered forcefully into the bourgeois psychic universe. Their readers – for the most part members of an educated elite – may have looked with disfavour on imaginative literature, but this did not prevent them from enjoying it. Justification could always be found that such literature lifted the spirit, or was improving because it provided reliable evidence on the villainy that prevailed.9 The genre, however, was relatively short-lived. By the early seventeenth century the cohesion of neo-feudal metropolitan culture was under threat from the destabilizing decline in power of its guilds and the exclusion of merchants from spheres of influence exercised by the Stuart court.10 Cony-catching pamphlets continued in revised forms but entered into irreversible decline since they were no longer able to provide visions of the urban appropriate to a more modern but narrowly vocal mentality.

London was in the process of reinventing itself through its literary culture as the site of mercantilist endeavour. Caroline plays, for example, celebrated bourgeois virtue and social harmony, while poetry contributed to the formation of an elite literary order that culminated in the eighteenth-century Augustan. The result was an urban literature which although heterogeneous cohered around the unified and dominant vision of an ascendant bourgeoisie. Subversive elements persisted, but these were either incorporated into the ‘polite and innovative accomplishments of later urbane writers’,11 or assumed by literary hacks who lacked the ability
to sustain alternative visions and hence challenge this dominance. Ned Ward’s *London Spy* (1698) inherited little of Dekker’s grasp of the complex plurality of London life.

The heterogeneity of this vision resulted from the diverse attempts sought by the eighteenth-century metropolitan bourgeoisie to grasp London’s totality as a precondition to the modernization of its streets, public spaces and built environment. The opportunity radically to rebuild the capital along planned and rational lines after the great fire of 1666 was squandered. Major thoroughfares were widened and large numbers of houses and public buildings reconstructed, but the medieval palimpsest was preserved, and much of the capital’s public space remained irregular, haphazard and dirty. This lack of vital space for citizens to meet, converse and relax in a secure and congenial environment hampered the constitution of new publics of privatized individuals. In response, conceptions of the space were transformed, and in the course of the eighteenth century legal, parochial and literary authorities attempted to know and hence civi- lize its streets. This project, in large part fuelled by a desire to identify public space as a bourgeois sphere, has been seen as integral to metropoli- tan modernity.

It was against this backdrop that urban improvement gathered momentum. Plans were outlined by John Spranger in 1754 which heralded a cultural geography of Westminster appropriate to its status as the locus of an ascendant commercial and imperial power:

_In all well-governed Countries, the first Care of the Governors hath been to make the Intercourse of the Inhabitants, as well as of Foreigners, sojourning in the Country, safe, easy and commodious, by open, free and regular High- ways. This is more especially incumbent on Trading Nations, as, without a free and safe Intercourse between Place and Place by Land as well as by water, trade cannot subsist, much less flourish._

He proposed that authority be invested in commissioners, elected by local ratepayers to make by-laws, raise funds through the rates and punish of- fenders. The resultant Act, 2 Geo. III cap. 21, provided Westminster with the power and finances to take control out of the hands of local bodies, and adopt systematic programmes of improvement, thereby guaranteeing an unprecedented uniformity in paving and street lighting.

Within this ethos of improvement a homology existed between moral and topographical visions. Public markets, buildings, thoroughfares, theatres, and places of entertainment and consumption were identified as the sites of bourgeois urbanity most in need of attention as a means of amelio- rating the unseemly chaos of much metropolitan life. When sensibilities of progress gathered momentum in the course of the eighteenth century, they were framed in terms of the physical rather than the human environ-
ment. Improvement was therefore predicated on a detailed knowledge of metropolitan topography; cartographers, surveyors, travel writers and poets applied themselves to the task of mapping the streets of the city, so opening them up to the bourgeois travellers. In this period London’s expansive physical body became known. John Strype’s edition of Stow’s Survey of London appeared in 1720. The product of nearly twenty years’ labour, it was, however, such a massive expansion of the original text by so much obsessive detail that Stow’s personal stamp was almost entirely lost. Strype mapped London’s topography through descriptive trav- elogues, interrupted by historical detours into churches, monuments, dignitaries and charities. But the intimate details of individual wards revealed little more than their physical streetscapes.

This was a venture made possible by the active involvement of commercial and political interests. The mayor and court of the City of Lon- don, to whom Strype dedicated the work, offered practical and financial support from the outset, and the list of subscribers included attorneys, goldsmiths, merchants and gentlemen. Most significant, however, were booksellers and printers, who numbered forty-three out of a total of 272. The control of cultural production was passing from the hands of personal patronage to the local state and the metropolitan market. These interests, augmented by the City, influential figures such as Horace Walpole, government offices and academic institutions numbering among four hundred subscribers, were also evident in the publication of John Rocque’s great maps of London. Published in 1746 as twenty-four imperial sheets making a map measuring thirteen by six and a half feet, they represented the first systematic cartographical survey of London since 1682. The map, drawn with an intricacy and precision previously unknown, was intended both as a reliable guide to the ‘street traveller’ and an accurate record of London’s world status as a commercial and imperial centre. In the event its form rendered it difficult to use, and it remained, like Strype’s survey, little more than an ordered inventory of names and shapes without interpretation.

Something of a transition was heralded by the publication in 1766 of the Rev. John Entick’s weighty and detailed record of the metropolis. Combining history, sociology and topography, Entick attempted for the first time a totalizing vision of the labyrinthine complexity of spaces of London previously beyond the purview of detached observers such as Strype. In this, he drew upon earlier surveys, particularly of Stow, but simultaneously anticipated the later survey of Charles Booth by over a hundred years:

*Grub-Street, as far as Sun-Alley, is in Cripplegate-Ward; but it is not either well-built, nor inhabited better than Moor-Lane. Nevertheless, it contains a*
number of courts and alleys, as, Lins-Alley, Honey-Stuckle Court, well built; Fleur de lis Court, Little Bell-Alley, Flying horse-Court, Oakley-Court, Butler’s Alley, Crosskeys Court, Great Bell Alley; all very mean.18

These surveys opened up Westminster and the City to the bourgeois pedestrian and traveller; all they now needed were clearly visible street names:

Whereas, were but the names of Streets cut on white Stones, the Letters blacken’d, and set up at every Corner, the Greatest strangers might, with the assistance of a small pocket Map, find his Way to any Part of these contiguous Cities and their extended Liberties.19

The attempt to know London’s complex physical totality was accompanied by changes in the literary appropriation of metropolitan space. The London of Daniel Defoe was akin to that of Strype and Rocque. Evident in his Tour thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain and novels such as Moll Flanders, it was one of a featureless, formless and two-dimensional inventory of street names and buildings, conveying a sense only of an anonymous and ceaseless traffic.20 More significant over time was the topography that came to be revealed in the writings of Augustan satirists. Pope, Gay, Swift and Hogarth provided dense maps of the city and its inhabitants that were not only reliable guides to its intimate topography, but simultaneously gazetteers of a distinct cultural geography in which the infested courts, alleys and markets became symbolic sites of a sombre regime of dullness. Their moral symbolism, therefore, was not located in some vague, Miltonic pandemonium, but on the congested physical landscape of London.21

As a result of these various impulses, in the latter half of the eighteenth century London streets became straighter, better paved, better lit, better known, more closely surveyed, cleaner – in short, more civilized and modern. Thus constituted, they in themselves formed an urban space fit for bourgeois intercourse and conviviality, but also a communications infrastructure opening up the new sites of relaxation – parks, shops, coffee houses and theatres – to a wider public.22 There remained, however, a continued threat to this modernization. Streets could be cleansed and straightened by the determined removal of physical detritus; human forms proved rather more stubborn. Beggars, vagabonds, and criminals of various descriptions found in the capital favourable sites for their trades, and as long as they contested its streets and found refuge in its innermost sanctuaries, bourgeois public space was never likely to be secured, modernized or cleansed.

And yet here was a constituency that remained remote from the inquiring gaze of urban explorers. The self-confident and celebratory guides that later took the bourgeois traveller around the most notable features of the
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commercial, social and built environment of the metropolis adopted a
panoramic vision in which London's grandeur, history and monumental-
ity emphasized the imperial, stately and symmetrical. Leigh's New Picture
of London, for example, first published around 1815 and reissued many
times subsequently, provided a view of the infrastructure of metropolitan
government, commerce, medicine and religion.23 Less authoritative guides
to historic buildings appeared,24 as did the more didactic.25 Here was an
ordered city, emptied entirely of the untidy and inconvenient presence of
people.26 Displaced and seemingly inaccessible in the literary appropria-
tion of the metropolis was any knowledge of its underworld. For all this
attention to accurate detail, the topographical imagery of eighteenth-
century writers tended toward a featureless and two-dimensional inven-
tory of streets and their inhabitants in which slum courts and alleys were
symbolic sites of moral depravity. Given the instinct to reveal overarching
moral patterns in pursuit of a vision of an ordered and harmonious
metropolis, there was a certain inevitability to their failure to grasp its
lowly forms. For this we need to turn to alternative literary genres.

Tricks of the town

The establishment toward the end of the seventeenth century of new eco-
omic and political settlements based on an ascendant bourgeois order
rendered obsolete the transgressive urban literature of Greene, Nashe and
Dekker, as a consequence of which it fragmented and declined. The radical
potential in revealing complex interconnections among diverse 'criminal'
activities in all sections of metropolitan life failed to materialize. Instead,
rogue literature degenerated into tediously reworked taxonomies of crim-
inal plurality encompassed within fictional narratives of the travelogue.
The Country Gentleman's Vade-Mecum; or, His Companion for the Town
effectively set the agenda. Published in 1699 to draw on the popularity of
Ward's London Spy, it comprised a series of letters written by a gentleman
now wise in the ways of city life to a friend in the country in an effort to
dissuade him from coming to London.27 It lacked the sensationalism of
Ward, and had little success, but seeds were sown of a genre that lasted
well into the nineteenth century.28 There followed A Trip through London
(1728), A Trip through the Town (1735), A Ramble through London
(1738), A Trip from St James's to the Exchange (1744), a revised edition of
The Country Gentleman's Vade-Mecum retitled as The Tricks of the Town
Laid Open (1747), and then dozens of pamphlets on the same theme,
most of which were shameless plagiarisms of the originals.29

Flat and unimaginative though this genre was, these moral baedeckers30
do provide clues to the nature of contemporary concern about the threat
from dissembling processes, in particular the poor inhabiting unknown
and inaccessible spaces:

The Town of London is a kind of large forest of Wild-Beasts where most of us range about at a venture, and are equally savage and mutually destructive one of another: … The strange Hurries and Impertinences, the busy Scrambling and Underminings; and what is worse, the monstrous Villainies, Cheats and Impostures in it…. [A gentleman] complained of the great number of Robberies and Riots, that were daily committed within the Bills of Mortality to the great scandal of the Christian Religion, and the Honour of the Nation, and the great trouble it gave the Magistrates, for that he had been Committing and Binding over all the Morning.31

The passage was reproduced word for word in subsequent versions and used to good effect by Henry Fielding in his Enquiry into the Recent Increase in Robberies (1751) (see later). The untamed forest thus became a familiar trope to capture a sense of threat experienced at a time when the metropolitan streetscape began to be surveyed for the first time.32 Beggars were singled out as a source of particular concern:

Turning out of Covent-Garden to go to the Strand I was accosted by several Beggars, maim’d, lame and lazy. As Pity is so often by our selves and in our own Cases mistaken for Charity, so it assumes the Shape and borrows the very name of it, a Beggar asks you to exert that Virtue for Jesus Christs sake, but all the while this great Design is to raise your pity … People not used to great Cities, being thus attacked on all sides, are commonly forced to yield, and cannot help giving something, tho’ they can hardly spare it themselves.33

These sentiments were those of a metropolitan bourgeoisie forced to contemplate the logical inconsistencies of its moral universe by a seeming antithesis. Beggars were a challenge not because they constituted a serious material threat but because they were able to touch directly the moral and aesthetic sensibilities of a metropolitan elite in public:

When sores are very bad, or seen otherwise afflicting in an extraordinary manner, and the Beggar can bear to have them exposed to the cold air, it is very shocking to some People; ‘tis a shame they cry such Sights shou’d be suffer’d: the main reason is, it touches their Pity feelingly, at the same time they are resolv’’d, either because they are covetous, or count it an idle Expense, to give nothing, which makes them more uneasy. They turn their Eyes, and where the Cries are dismal, some would willingly stop their Ears, mend their Pace, and be very angry in their Hearts, that Beggars shou’d be about Streets.34

It was a peculiarly modern challenge (one which many of us still find familiar and uncomfortable) whose symbolic importance seemed to gain force as London emerged as a great commercial and imperial centre. The threat posed by beggars to bourgeois space was transcoded to the nation.
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Take, for example, Joshua Gee’s *The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered*, first published in 1729, and reprinted many times subsequently. This was a substantial thesis on the ‘mighty consequence’ of trade, and the threat posed to ‘vast riches’ by the ‘want of due regard and attention’. It contained thirty-four chapters describing in detail Britain’s trade with various countries around the world, and outlining proposals for increasing its share, most notably by ‘enlarging the plantation trade’ since it was the ‘one great cause of enriching this nation’. Among them, however, was a chapter entitled ‘Proposals for better regulating and employing the poor’. This seeming incongruity makes sense only when the location of the poor within empire is understood:

But notwithstanding we have so many excellent Laws, great numbers of sturdy beggars, loose and vagrant Persons infest the Nation, but no place more than in the city of London and parts adjacent. If any Person is born with any defect or deformity, or maimed by fire, or any other casualty, or by any inveterate distemper, which renders them miserable Objects, their way is open to London, where they have free Liberty of shewing their nauseous sights to terrify People, and force them to give money to get rid of them; and those vagrants have, for many years past, removed out of several parts of the three kingdoms, and taken their stations in this Metropolis, to the interruption of Conversations and Business.35

The consequence, Gee argued, drawing on contemporary concern about luxury, was ‘very pernicious; for what they get by begging, is consumed commonly in ale-houses, gin shops, etc.’. The solution was mercantilist: ‘The first and greatest [remedy] will be in finding effectual ways for employing our Poor, and putting all the hands to work, either at Home, or in the Plantations, who cannot support themselves’.36

The vast torrent of luxury

It was in Henry Fielding’s *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751), however, that we can see the most determined attempt to think through the relationships among metropolitan poverty, street crime and the progress of the nation.37 Written at a time of heightened anxiety about the future of the nation, it was a work of awkward synthesis rather than originality, but while replete with conceptual confusion it had the merit of articulating the complex range of contemporary concern. Descriptions of the poor, for example, drew upon familiar rhetoric aired in debates on the poor law and in rogue literature. And the identification of ‘expensive diversions’, ‘drunkenness’ and ‘gaming’ as the sources of crime reflected sentiments repeated constantly in literature, courts, churches and parliament on the corrosive influence of luxury. Overall, Fielding’s
approach to the nature, rights and impact of the poor was informed strongly by conventional economic, religious and legal thought. Using a familiar taxonomy he divided the poor into those ‘unable to work’, ‘able and willing to work’, and ‘able to work, but not willing’. Beggars, most of whom were recruited from the first two classes, were not of particular concern. If in England ‘should be found more Beggars, more distress and miserable objects than are to be seen thro-out all the States of Europe’, this was owing to the virtuous humanity of ‘all men of Property’, who are ‘so forward to relieve the Appearance of Distress in their Fellow-creatures’ that they fail to appreciate that they are encouraging a nuisance. More threatening were the vagabonds, who were unwilling to work, preferring to find their way to London where they could thieve while avoiding detection:

Whoever indeed considers the Cities of London and Westminster, with the late vast Addition of their Suburbs, the great irregularity of their Buildings, the immense Number of Lanes, Alleys, Courts and Bye-places; must think, that, had they been intended for the very Purpose of Concealment, they could scarce have been better contrived. Upon such a View, the whole appears as a vast Wood or Forest, in which a Thief may harbour with as great Security, as wild Beasts do in the Desarts of Africa or Arabia. For by wandering from one Part to another, and often shifting his quarters, he may almost avoid the Possibility of being discovered.

A lengthy diversion into Anglo-Saxon mythology followed in which Fielding celebrated the ancient constitution introduced by Alfred to ‘prevent the Concealment of Thieves and Robbers’ in the immediate aftermath of the state of licentiousness and rapine brought by Danish invaders. The intimate powers that surveillance made possible, however, had been undermined by free movement of the poor about the country. Legislation subsequently introduced to deal with the problem by enforcing settlement and employment had proved ineffective because of undue expense and administration, as a result of which criminal activity flourished, particularly on the streets of London.

As a reforming magistrate who encountered directly those unfortunates who were unable to avoid ‘discovery’, Fielding displayed a predictable tendency to criminalize the streets, and in so doing redefined the criminal geography of the metropolis. Of equal significance, however, was the extent to which he drew upon mercantilist thought and contemporary concern about luxury in elaborating the causes of crime and proposals for its amelioration. Citing freely the orthodoxies of William Petty, Josiah Child and Charles D’Avenant, Fielding displayed a guarded enthusiasm for the benefits of colonial trade, ‘by which the Grandeur and Power of the Nation is carried to a Pitch that it could never otherwise have reached’.
Such trade was of advantage to Britain so long as a favourable balance of trade be maintained and emigration create more employment in home manufactures. Under these circumstances the costs of production had to be minimized. The lives of the industrious poor should be frugal, sparse and settled, while the reserve army of the idle and criminal be converted into productive labour. From the darkness of 1751, however, Fielding – somewhat contradictorily – saw only dysfunction. Trade produces riches, which in turn promote luxury, with inevitable consequences:

Nothing hath wrought such an Alteration in this Order of People, as the Introduction of Trade. This hath indeed given a new Face to the whole Nation, hath in great measure subverted the former State of Affairs, and hath almost totally changed the Manners, Customs, and Habits of the People, more especially of the lower Sort. The Narrowness of their Fortune is changed into Wealth; the Simplicity of their Manners changed into Craft, their Frugality into Luxury, their Humility into Pride, and their Subjugation into Equality…. I think that the vast Torrent of Luxury which the late Years hath poured itself into this Nation, hath greatly contributed to produce among many others, the Mischief I here complain of.43

Luxury is not, therefore, a ‘casual Evil’, but a threat to the empire. Drawing upon Middleton’s Life of Cicero, Fielding makes the inevitable comparisons with Rome. Like this once ‘Mistress of the World, the Seat of Arts, Empire and Glory’, Britain risks running the same course ‘from virtuous Industry to Wealth; from Wealth to Luxury; from Luxury to and Impatience of Discipline and Corruption of Morals’, thus sliding into a state of ‘Sloth, Ignorance and Poverty, enslaved to the most cruel, as well as to the most contemptible Tyrants, Superstition and Religious Impos- ture’.44

In analysing the causes of London crime, the consequences of allowing thieves to find refuge in the private and gothic haunts of London’s congested slums, and the seeming ineffectiveness of public executions in deterring crimes against property, Fielding revealed that the most intense fear in the minds of eighteenth-century London’s property owners arose not from the petty activities of villains and rogues described in rogue literature, but from the threat posed by the violent excesses of murderers, highwaymen and footpads. The ordering of criminal and poor space in the metropolis was, however, complex and dynamic. It was intimately related to perceived distinctions between criminal and pauper activity, and their structural underpinnings. ‘The nature and importance of illegality were in part defined by its social location’, argues McMullan,45 but the process was reciprocal – space was also powerfully formed by its criminalization. Criminal enclaves persisted in the bourgeois imagination as proximate antitheses of its own space in the City and Westminster, but at particular
moments of economic depression, bourgeois space itself was seen as threatened by incursions from the only too visible presence of beggars.

We understand little of this dynamic. What is apparent is that much of the writing on metropolitan poverty and crime during the eighteenth century was consciously or otherwise an attempt to think through this spatial reordering. Inevitably, the previous era of metropolitan history had a formative influence. In the period from 1550 to 1700 distinct criminal enclaves emerged with a powerful sense of territorial independence that persisted until the mid nineteenth century.\footnote{46} Thus the Clink and the Mint in Southwark, Whitefriars and Alsatia at the City’s south-eastern boundary, Spitalfields and Whitechapel, and the Newgate–Cripplegate area entered into popular imagination as congested zones of criminal activity. Here were defensible spaces where thieves, prostitutes, cheats and beggars found refuge from the law and public surveillance. The complex networks of alleys, lanes and stairs made pursuit difficult, and it was rendered even more so by strategies of mutual protection adopted by their inhabitants to discourage intruders.

This unknowability contrasted sharply with the only too visible presence of beggars on the main thoroughfares. Stationary beggars adopted strategies that relied on distinct appropriations of space.\footnote{47} Sites offering privileged access to pedestrian and carriage traffic were occupied and jealously guarded. Thus the Royal Exchange, St Paul’s, the Strand and Charing Cross were favoured. Here beggars could prey upon the sensibilities of large numbers of passers-by without undue risk of apprehension under the vagrant laws. The least mobile had to claim their pitch early in the morning, over time they became familiar figures in the metropolitan streetscape.\footnote{48}

Beggars and petty thieves were perceived as less of a threat than hardened professional criminals such as thieves, footpads and highwaymen. Beggars may have jostled and disgusted bourgeois pedestrians, but they rarely posed a danger to personal and material well-being. And draconian as the vagrancy laws were, they could hardly compare with the murderous judicial regime created by the litany of capital statutes introduced at the beginning of the century under which minor acts of theft commanded the death penalty. For the most part, beggars were seen as an inconvenient and unpleasant presence on metropolitan streets.

At particular moments, however, when their numbers increased dramatically, more serious concern was expressed in the literature. The extent of begging was determined by the state of the labour market. It was linked, therefore, to the trade cycle, and if it were possible accurately to chart the course of trade, correlations could be made between economic recessions and concern over begging. The eighteenth-century picture, however, was complicated by the frequent interruptions of imperial wars.\footnote{49}
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Although the effect of war depended upon the particular stage in the trade cycle when it broke out, what is not in doubt is the impact that the cease of hostilities had on unemployment. As war ended, tens of thousands of ex-soldiers and sailors were dumped on the streets to survive as best they could; many did so through begging and crime. Some 157,000 men were discharged in 1713–14 (War of the Spanish Succession), 79,000 in 1749–50 (War of the Austrian Succession), 155,000 in 1764–65 (Seven Years War), 160,000 in 1784–85 (American War of Independence), and 350,000 after 1815 (Napoleonic Wars). Unsurprisingly, these were the moments of the most intense anxiety about the state of metropolitan streets, when the putative links between begging and crime were stated most forcefully.

The distinction between roguery and villainy was also evident in popular literature. Rogues were rascals, generally without malice, who lived and worked on the peripheries of the criminal underworld. From the seventeenth century, their culture was described in the picaresque literature of jest books, canting verses and lexicons, travelogues and biographies. In this literature had appeared the first attempts to know the underworld of early modern London, but during the eighteenth century the genre created by Greene and Harman degenerated into tedious formulae. Previous works were pirated, canting lexicons repeated with little variation. Similar trajectories were apparent in fictional and dramatic representations. Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew* and John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* have long been recognized as among the most popular and significant plays about roguery. In seeming to celebrate the comparative freedom of beggars from the economic and moral restraint of the time, they touched on a range of contemporary concerns. But these concerns were not around beggars. First staged during the extreme tensions of 1641, *A Jovial Crew* used a familiar narrative of redemption to expose the hazardous and circumscribed liberty of anyone denied property and political rights in an arbitrary and savage regime. And *The Beggar’s Opera*, performed in the aftermath of the bloody regime heralded by the introduction of the Black Act and the troubled economic climate created by the South Sea Bubble fiasco, used a London gang of highwaymen and thieves [not beggars] to expose the hypocrisy and corruption of upper-class rule embodied in the Walpole regime.

Rogue fiction in the remainder of the eighteenth century possessed little of this critical capacity. Cibber Colley’s production of *The Beggar’s Wedding* (1729), *The Beggar’s Pantomime* (1736) and the revival of a traditional tale in *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* (1741) were examples of fanciful celebrations of the putative exoticism and gaiety of outlaw life. All these were eclipsed, however, by the extraordinary success of *An Apology for the Life of Bampfylde-Moore Carew*, first published in 1745 and reprinted in a considerable variety of editions until well into the
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nineteenth century. It recounted the story ‘taken from the mouth’ of Carew, the son of a Devonshire gentleman, who toured Britain and North America in the company of beggars, whose culture the book claimed to reveal. Like most other rogue literature of the eighteenth century, however, it was a clumsy compilation of extracts from other publications, including Dekker’s *Belman of London* (1608), Harman, Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and canting dictionaries. Its success, concluded Chandler, ‘was disproportionate to its merit’.

This literature stood in sharp contrast to an alternative genre of rogue literature, namely, criminal biography. Well over 2,000 pamphlets in this genre appeared between the late seventeenth century when fears first found expression and the late eighteenth century as anxiety receded. Narrating the lives of criminals, most of whom were located within London, they were read enthusiastically by or to virtually all sections of the population. The socio-poetics of this literature suggests that by providing mythical resolutions to crime and retribution it mitigated the fears of the propertied who felt threatened and of the dispensers of justice who pondered on its effectiveness. Ostensibly describing in lurid detail the careers and dying confessions of convicted villains, the accounts were rather more than vicarious sources of sensation for the reader. They rendered criminal activity fictional, strange, unfamiliar and hence distant. Thus disturbing questions about criminal lives were sweetened by frivolous and inchoate detail, making them more palatable for an audience anxious that crimes against property were ‘too often at the margins of consciousness, and too ready to intrude’.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, as their social and political salience weakened, so criminal biographies became rare. By the 1740s petty criminals attracted little attention; by the 1770s, even highwaymen were forgotten. It was as if a closure had been forced on attempts to gain access to or even register the presence of the criminal poor in the metropolis. Thus, in spite of numerous topographical and literary surveys that attempted to confer order on the criminalized spaces of the metropolis, by the end of the eighteenth century it was apparent that its underworld remained remote and inaccessible.

The extensive literature on the metropolitan poor, vague and imprecise thought it may have been in identifying the boundaries between its various constituencies, did help to promote change in the latter half of the eighteenth century. After 1750, and in particular during 1780–1820, the violent and brutal excesses of metropolitan life gradually diminished. Contemporary observers such as John Fielding and Francis Place noted the transformation in manners among the populace as lives became cleaner, healthier and less precarious. These improvements, according to Dorothy George, were engendered by reforms in the administration of
justice, pioneered by the Fieldings. Henry supplanted the corruption of trading justices by a public and disinterested magistracy, which was developed by his half-brother John into a reforming institution, laying the foundation for a permanent police force, and confronting the toll taken by gin on the London poor. Simultaneously, local government was rationalized. Vestries, still existing as a complex patchwork of overlapping authorities, obtained enabling legislation to regulate the poor more effectively. Rates were levied to clean and light the streets, to establish watch committees, and generally to set parish affairs on a more efficient and financially sound footing. Some escaping the net of these reforms found a champion in Jonas Hanway, who, concerned that the high mortality rates among children of the metropolitan poor threatened the very existence of the nation, set about saving them by establishing foundling hospitals, and campaigning for the abolition of climbing boys and the worst abuses of the apprenticeship system.

Significant also were shifts in the moral universe of the poor law. For the century following the fall of the Stuarts, perspectives on poverty had hardened. Quite apart from the demonization of beggars and vagrants, those forced legitimately to seek relief were viewed as personally inadequate and subjected to harsh disciplinary regimes. Toward the end of the eighteenth century attitudes softened. Poverty began to be seen as less of a crime, and more of an unfortunate consequence of trade depression and low wages. Tracts were published to expose the undue hardships suffered under the poor law, in response to which the 1783 Gilbert Act was introduced. In ending parochial administration of relief in most areas of the country, it signalled a more humane and sympathetic approach to the poor. In general, levels of poor relief increased in this period.

Important as these changes may have been to the life chances of the poor, the impact of underlying improvements in the metropolitan economy has been neglected. The protracted and deep depression that afflicted London from 1726 began to lift in the 1750s and from then until the turn of the century expansion, as measured by a variety of indicators such as foreign trade, building and coal imports, was healthy and sustained. Population change mirrored this pattern, with a period of stagnation or even decline up to 1750 followed by growth of some 50 per cent by 1800. Any assessment, however, of the effect of these movements on income levels is troublesome, not least because of the diversity in life chances. Overall, it appears that while the 1760s and 1770s were made difficult by international conflicts, the years following 1784 were good.

It may seem surprising that amidst this climate of improvement expressions of foreboding gathered strength, becoming particularly strident after 1815. The paradox has been explained by a mounting concern with the putative destruction wrought by luxury, and with the decline in
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subordination. In the figure of the relatively well fed artisan these conflicting sentiments could be articulated together to construct an image of moral deterioration threatening the nation. But these fears cannot explain adequately the transformation in attitudes toward the metropolitan poor that occurred in the crisis decade of the 1790s, largely under the influence of Patrick Colquhoun. Moving freely in influential political and commercial circles, mixing with leading evangelicals, utilitarians, and other social reformers, he was able best to articulate the range of contemporary concerns around metropolitan poverty and define aspects of an agenda that was profoundly to shape nineteenth-century perspectives on the metropolitan poor. Before considering this, however, it is necessary briefly to consider how India had entered into the British imagination.

India in European cosmography

The argument that India came to be better known to the British in the late eighteenth century is a seductive one. Recognition of the potential of imperial conquest heightened European rivalry, and impelled projects to investigate the topography, people, culture and history of the subcontinent; the actuality of conquest provided unprecedented opportunities for so doing. As a consequence, in the years following Clive’s crucial victory at Plassey in 1757 the number of publications on India increased dramatically.

It is an argument, however, that has to be treated with a degree of caution, not least because it tends to understate the contribution made by early travel writings on India. From the extraordinary life work of Donald Lach we gain a measure of the extent and diversity of European views of Asia during 1500–1800, and the impact that these changing knowledges had on European artistic and intellectual endeavour. More recently, Joan-Pau Rubies has revealed the significance of writings by European travellers to India during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In contrast to Lach’s copious Asia in the Making of Europe, and to the pioneering work of Margaret Hodgen on early modern ethnology, Rubies focuses on the question of how travel literature structured moral and political thought, and so contributed to the transition from the theological epistemology of medieval European culture to the historical and philosophical concerns of the nascent Enlightenment. It was not merely that this literature dispelled notions of the fantastic and monstrous by an elaboration of human diversity, but that by forcing recognition of cultural difference it radically challenged prevailing orthodoxies on the human order.

Situated as it was in European cosmography in a peculiar and troublesome relationship to Chinese civilization and the New World, and possessing its own ancient culture, India presented a particular challenge. In
confronting it, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian travellers wrote accounts that were not, of course, the product of innocent observation, but were framed by what Stuart Schwartz has termed implicit understandings. Travellers drew upon a body of common knowledge that was rarely elaborated, but at the same time was open to revision as knowledge accumulated. Nor were these accounts simply the outcome of a putative ‘orientalist’ project, for perceptions were influenced by dialogue with indigenous peoples, and by the practical interests that guided the authors’ travels. Accounts of early travels to the few coastal areas that were known sought answers to questions determined for the most part by the commercial concerns of merchants and soldiers. Lacking training in theology, law or the humanities, and the erudition to undertake comparative analysis, these travellers attempted to make sense of India’s diversity through detailed empirical observation. Recourse was frequently had to pejorative stereotypes of ‘black and inferior natives’; what prevailed, however, was a profound sense of the difficulty of providing a unified and coherent image. Furthermore, many of these accounts remained unpublished or were, in the pursuit of Iberian imperial ambitions, restricted, as such they were marginal to the development of European cosmography.

In England, knowledge of India was sketchy, unreliable and largely mythical. Until the latter stages of the sixteenth century, merchants and priests demonstrated little interest in challenging Portuguese dominance better to exploit trade with India or to convert its population. Without first-hand accounts of travellers, prevailing wisdom was based exclusively on translations of medieval cosmographies and travel books. The exotic, monstrous and fabulous found in Sir John Mandeville’s Travels were still taken seriously by geographers. This ignorance was compounded by restrictions on the printing and book trades imposed by authorities fearful of sedition and heresy. Translations of foreign works on overseas travel were forbidden; even Mandeville suffered, for while four editions had appeared between 1498 and 1510, no other was published until 1568.

Toward the late sixteenth century Jesuit missionaries in India laid the foundations for an epistemological transformation. Working with a sophisticated interpretative framework that made possible comparisons among non-European peoples, they published accounts that attempted increasingly to locate India within a wider comparative field. Descriptions of its topography and economy were displaced if not superseded by ethnographic and historical narratives – part of the shift from the spatial to the temporal that defined the course of early ethnology, and on the basis of which India was positioned hierarchically between Africa and Europe. By this time, however, Portugal’s hold on trade with India had begun to weaken, and its monopoly was challenged with some success by Dutch commercial initiatives. Encouraged, English merchants embarked on
ventures to determine the feasibility of a north-east passage to China and India. Jesuit and merchant travellers began to record their observations, and the East entered symbolically into England’s burgeoning literary domain. England’s relationship with Asia underwent a profound transformation.

It was through the writings of Father Thomas Stephens, Ralph Fitch, Thomas Coriat, Edward Terry and other travellers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that England ‘discovered’ India, and finally put to rest Mandeville’s ghost. Although most of these travellers acted at the behest of commerce – focused after 1600 in the activities of the East India Company – their accounts cannot be reduced simply to crude reflections of those interests. Nor were they written to be read exclusively by Company functionaries. When in 1625 Samuel Purchas published his anthology of travel writings, he offered ‘for [those] which cannot travell farre … a World of Travellers to their domestike entertainment, easie to be spared from their Smoke, cup, and Butter-flie vanities … and to entertain them in a better Schoole to better purposes’.74 No incongruity may have been felt in providing reliable information on trade and topography, pseudo-ethnological knowledge and tales of wonder, but in meeting such demands the accounts drew contraditorily upon observation and medieval fantasy to produce diverse and unstable narratives.

The Jesuit Thomas Stephens was arguably the first Englishman known to have lived in and written about India.75 Arriving there in 1579, he wrote to his father, setting the tone for subsequent accounts. The long letter provided valuable information on maritime routes around Madagascar, the fauna of the southern seas, and first impressions of the Indians. ‘The people be tawny’, he declared, effectively locating them in the great chain of being, ‘but not disfigured in their lips and noses, as the Moors and Kaffirs of Ethiopia.’76 Stephens is remembered best, however, as an English pioneer in the study of Indian languages, and the founder of Christian literature in Goa. After nearly forty years in India he completed in 1614 the Christian Purana, an account of the Old and New Testaments in Marathi intended to reveal through comparison with Hindu Puranas the idolatrous and heathen nature of Hinduism. It was still in popular use in the twentieth century.77

Unsurprisingly, accounts of merchant travellers provided the most reliable information on the commercial potential of India at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In their various ways, Ralph Fitch, Thomas Coriat, Thomas Roe, Edward Terry, Henry Lord and others mapped out favourable terrain for exploitation by an ascendant mercantile elite. They noted places where precious metals and stones, spices, foodstuffs and other commodities could be found, recorded routes and journey times between ports and cities, and described the types of trade conducted.79 In
pursuit of commercial concessions many were drawn to the Mughal court
where they were dazzled by its wealth, exoticism and grandeur, and mysti-
fied by what they saw as the capriciousness of Jehangir, Shah Jehan and
Aurangzib.

Of greater interest here are observations on the social and cultural prac-
tices of the Indians encountered. Constant references to the veracity of
first-hand observation were included to validate their authenticity to an
intended readership, but amidst the detail what emerges from these writ-
ings is a sense of the struggle to describe and comprehend the seemingly
incomprehensible. Meticulous some accounts may have been, but these
travellers viewed India through the lens of earlier narratives found in epic
stories, the Bible, classical tales and medieval travelogues; in so doing they
laid the foundation for the poetics of a nascent geographical and ethnologi-
cal consciousness.79 Thus, to interpret the mystery and marvel of India
they turned to familiar tropes of otherness, structured almost exclusively
by a Christian cosmography. Coriat, for example, described that most
spectacular of Hindu festivals, the Kumb Mela, in terms that would have
had meaning for his readers:

I expect an excellent opportunity ... to goe to the famous River Ganges,
whereof about foure hundred thousand people go hither ... to bathe in the
River, and to sacrifice a world of gold in the same River ... and doing other
notable strange Ceremonies most worth of obseruation, such a notable spec-
tacle it is, that in no part of all Asia ... [is] the like to be seen; this show doe
they make once every yeere, coming hither from places almost thousand
miles off, and honour their Riuer as their God, Creator, Saviour; superstition
and impeity most abominable ... these brutish Ethnickes, that are aliens.80

From these various accounts emerged a stock repertoire of customs and
traits that came to define Indianness for European readers. Nakedness,
child marriage, sati, idolatry, Brahmanism, thuggee and sacrifice in par-
ticular seemed to outrage European sensibilities, as a result of which they
featured prominently in a collective consciousness which remained intact
for at least the next two hundred years. The examples proliferate. Fitch
noted that in spite of the abundance of cotton cloth, the people of
Sonargaon in East Bengal ‘goe with a little cloth before them, and all the
rest of their bodies is naked’.81 In other parts of India, notable contempo-
rary travellers such as the Italians Ludovico Di Varthema and Pietro Della
Valle and the Dutch Jan Huygen van Linschoten made virtually identical
observations.82 Sati was singled out by William Methold, Edward Terry,
Francois Bernier, Henry Lord and Nicholas Withington. The last captured
graphically the lot of condemned widows:

[I]f any one of them purpose to burn, and [after Ceremonies done] bee brought
to the Fyer, and these feelinge the scorching Heate, leape out of the Fyre, her
Father and Mother will take her and bynde her, and throwe her into the Fyre, and burne her per force.83

Forraigne sects

Reliable though many of the observations were, at best they were superfluous with no real understanding of Indian culture. Not until the publication in 1630 of Lord's *A Display of Two Forraigne Sects in the East Indies* was there a serious attempt to interpret Hindu and Parsi religious practices by consulting with Indian pundits. Replete with error, prejudice and confusion it may have been, but Lord's study of ancient mythology and the origins of caste was notable, later commanding the attention and praise of William Jones.84 It was also published in France and Holland, and formed the basis of numerous commentaries on these religions by better-known travellers such as Thomas Herbert and Francois Bernier.

The existence of common tropes in these early accounts derives in part from the extensive textual borrowing that took place among writers of the time. Most travellers were familiar with earlier narratives and plagiarized them freely. Fitch, for example, relied so heavily on Cesare Federici's account of a journey to India twenty years earlier, that he reproduces not only empirical detail, but style and language.85 This pan-European outlook was encouraged by the general availability of travel literature. Indeed, it seems likely that in the early modern period, translations of foreign accounts had the greatest influence on English readers. The fanciful imagination of Mandeville continued to exert its presence, but toward the end of the sixteenth century the exploits of contemporary European travellers began to appear.86 Largely under the guidance of Richard Eden, Richard Willes and Richard Hakluyt, collections of foreign travel literature were published which were designed to encourage English merchants to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the East for commercial and imperial exploitation.87 Eden's *A Treatise of the Newe India* appeared in 1553, subsequently to be revised and expanded in Willes's *The History of Trauayle in the West and East Indies* (1577). More important, however, were the translations of Juan de Mendoza's *History of China* (1588), Cesare Federici's *The Voyage and Travaile of M.C. Federici* (1588), John van Linschoten's *His Discours of Voyages into ye East and West Indies* (1598) and anonymous accounts of the first two Dutch voyages to India (1598 and 1599).

Accounts of the early English travellers were less well known.88 Coriat (1613) and Lord (1630) were among the very few successful in having their accounts published. Most of the original manuscripts of travelogues appeared for the first time in the second edition of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* (1598–1600) or in Purchas's *Pilgrimes* (1625), and then in
abridged forms. A letter of Thomas Stephens and the accounts of Ralph Fitch, John Mildenhall, William Hawkins, William Finch, Nicholas Withington and Edward Terry were all published in one of these collections; it was not until the nineteenth century that most of these were published in their own right.

But the availability of travel accounts was a necessary rather than sufficient condition; other factors were involved. Few authors strove for originality. Their aim was to provide reliable and comprehensive information, and if this meant recourse to accounts of places visited by previous travellers then it was available as a ready and convenient option. In turn, this borrowing was predicated on and promoted cultural assumptions about India from which certain European perspectives emerged on its peoples, customs and topography that informed the strategic repertoire of imperial discourses during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

For the remainder of the seventeenth century little of originality appeared. The best known – Herbert’s *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begunne Anno 1626* – appeared in 1634. It contained first-hand descriptions of coastal areas, but much of the information on Indian cultural practices derived from earlier studies. Only with the publication of Robert Knox’s *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* in 1681 and John Ovington’s *A Voyage to Surat* in 1696 were significant new areas of the Indian subcontinent opened to the public gaze. Anthologies, however, again proved the most popular. *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* was the result of the labours of the London booksellers Awnsham and John Churchill. It was first published as four volumes in 1704, and contained numerous travel writings of the seventeenth century. The volumes were reprinted in 1732, supplemented by two others. Contemporaneously, John Harris edited *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca, or, A Compleat Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Originally, it was little more than a compendium of accounts previously published in Hakluyt and Purchas, but in the 1740s it was revised and enlarged by John Campbell. Determined to promote British commercial activity and overcome what he considered to be the indolent attitude displayed toward discovery, Campbell claimed to have drawn upon more than 600 volumes. And in 1743 the bookseller Thomas Astley issued in instalments his ambitious *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*. It was essentially a compendium of what Astley considered to be the most reliable accounts. Attracting over a thousand subscribers, amongst whom were large numbers of merchants and brokers rather than clergymen, it provided evidence of the critical role of booksellers in promoting this literature, and of the growing attention it commanded in commercial circles. For those who could not afford the costly collections, even when published in instalments, popular periodicals provided an alternative source of information. The Gentle-
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man’s Magazine, the London Magazine, and later the Monthly Review and the Critical Review contained regular reviews of travel books, and long serial articles on foreign regions which freely included extensive extracts from previously published materials.92

Important though these anthologies were in meeting the need for information, they remained compendia of earlier accounts and thereby contributed only limited knowledge of the contemporary world. Those requiring up-to-date knowledge of India were poorly served. Anthologies included few relevant accounts of India, and original travelogues were conspicuous by their absence.93 That of Captain Alexander Hamilton,94 published in 1727, seemed sensitive to the problem, for at the outset he is anxious to claim legitimacy on the basis of the veracity of first-hand observation:

You will find [this account] more particular, correct and extensive, than any of the kind, at least, of any that I ever saw…. I’ll not acknowledge mistakes of taken before Map-travellers, or who have only the Sanction of other Mens Journals, or Memoirs to qualify them…. [A]lthough some amuse the World with large and florid Descriptions of countries they never saw used, yet, since their Stock of Knowledge is all on Tick, the want of being Eye and Ear-witnesses very much depreciates their accounts.95

To illustrate the point Hamilton refers to the ‘ingenious Observations and Remarks’ published by a ‘reverend Gentleman’ in 1690. He ‘received a great deal of Applause, and many Encomiums’, and yet

his greatest Travels were in Maps, and the Knowledge he had of the Countries … was the Accounts he gathered from common Report; and perhaps, those Reports came successively to him by Second or Third Hands; for, to my certain Knowledge, there were none then at Surat or Bombay that could furnish him with any tolerable Accounts of some Countries that he describes.96

None of these strictures, however, prevented Hamilton from reproducing a familiar miscellany of history, topography, trade and religion, or from indulging in condemnations of the strange and exotic. Ascetics were singled out for opprobrium:

There is another Sort called Jougies, who practise great Austerities and Mortifications. They contemn world Riches, and go naked, except for a Bit of Cloth about their Loyns, and some deny themselves even that, delighting in Nastiness and an holy Obscenity, with a great Shew of Sanctity…. I have seen a sanctified Rascal of seven foot high, and his limbs well proportioned, with a large Turband of his own Hair wreathed about his Head, and his body bedaub’d with Ashes and Water, sitting quite naked under the Shade of a Tree, with a Pudenda like an Ass, and a Hole bored through his Prepuce, with a large Gold Ring fixed in the Hole. This Fellow was much revered by numbers of young married women, who, prostrating themselves before the
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living Priapus, and taking him devoutly in their Hands, kiss him, whilst his bawdy Owner strokes their silly Heads, muttering some filthy Prayers for their Prolification.97

The absence of significant new travel accounts hampered British knowledge of India, as did the paucity and unreliability of information on those few territories under control of the British gleaned from functionaries of the East India Company. There was simply no ‘body of “colonial knowledge”, but, instead, a congeries of technical commercial information and impressions drawn from diplomatic discourse with Indian states’.98

Indeed, it seems likely that in the first half of the eighteenth century knowledge of India and understanding of its culture declined: into the gap flowed familiar tropes of orientalist fantasy.

These faltering attempts in early travel literature to know London and India displayed sharp contrasts. Evidence of dialogue between the genres is scant. What prevails, however, is a continued sense of epistemological insecurity which in the course of the eighteenth century actually heightened. The absence of significant new inquiry that could have drawn productively on previous work created a vacuum which was filled by tropes of criminal and orientalist fantasy. The crisis in confidence attendant on the collapse of the first British empire and the outbreak of the French Revolution impelled new modes of observation. If a unitary field of knowledge was created between metropolis and India it was surely at this moment.

Notes

6 I have explored this in my Introduction to Marriott [ed.], Unknown London.
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11 Ibid., p. 519.
16 Ogborn, Spaces of Modernity, pp. 30–1.
18 Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 132.
22 Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, p. 17.
24 W. Hutton, A Journey to London, Comprising a Description of the Most Interesting Objects of Curiosity to a Visitor of the Metropolis, London, Nichols, 1818.
30 This felicitous term is borrowed from Byrd, London Transformed.
31 Anon., A Trip through London, pp. 113, 122.
32 Byrd (London Transformed, p. 25) suggests that images of forests and labyrinths invoked not only adventure, but also alienation and anonymity at a time when the scale and pace of metropolitan growth seemed beyond comprehension. Their pervasiveness, however, derived from a versatility in conjuring up a range of discourses, including an antithetical unknown (no doubt with Freudian undertones), and images of imperial expansion.
33 Anon., A Trip from St James’s to the Royal Exchange, p. 12.
34 Ibid., pp. 12–13.
36 Ibid., p. 36.
39 Ibid., p. 65.
40 Ibid., p. 38.
41 Ibid., p. 116.
42 Ibid., p. xxiv.
43 Ibid., pp. xi, 3.
44 Ibid., p. xxxi.
47 These should be distinguished from itinerant domestic beggars and the beggarly self-employed, who were less numerous and perceived to be rather less of a problem. For a discussion of these issues, see Tim Hitchcock, ‘Beggar-man, thief: the publicity of poverty in early eighteenth-century London’, unpublished paper, 1998.
48 Some of these were portrayed in an outstanding collection of contemporary engravings in J. Smith, *Vagabondiana; or, Anecdotes of Mendicant Wanderers through the Streets of London, with Portraits of the Most Remarkable* London, Chatto and Windus, 1817.
55 Ibid., p. 175.
56 It would be interesting to trace the links between this reforming zeal and the moral endeavour to humanize London. Between the apocalyptic visions of Defoe and Blake, poets and writers such as Pope, Johnson, Boswell and Wordsworth attempted to bring the metropolis within the scale of human imagination. Through anthropomorphic projections, they revealed a struggle to control the vital energies that brought together and sustained the city in the latter half of the eighteenth century. For tentative glimpses into these matters, see Byrd, *London Transformed*, and M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, New York, Norton, 1971.
57 This is an argument found in Dorothy George’s *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*. It is one, however, that has to be treated with some caution. The evidence submitted to the select committees on mendicity and vagrancy, and on the police in the metropolis, for example, much of which addressed the question of change over the previous decades, was rather more ambivalent. While many of the witnesses pointed to improvement, others testified that conditions had deteriorated sharply—a reflection of the continued lack of knowledge about London poverty. *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Select Committee Appointed by the House of Commons to Inquire into the State of Mendicity and Vagrancy in the Metropolis and its Neighbourhood*, London, Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1815, *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the
Select Committee Appointed by the House of Commons to Inquire into the State of the Police of the Metropolis, London, Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1816). I touch on the evidence later (pp. 71, 75).

58 George, London Life, pp. 18–23.

59 Jonas Hanway, An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor, particularly those belonging to the Parishes within the Bills of Mortality, London, Dodsley, 1766.


61 See, for example, James Massie, Considerations relating to the poor, London, 1758; and J. Scott, Observations on the state of the parochial and vagrant poor, London, 1773.

62 The Gilbert Act was not applied to London parishes. Indeed it was not until the 1867 Metropolitan Poor Law Act that all of London was brought under the centralized authority of the Poor Law Board. This exceptionalism lends weight to the suggestion that the administration of the poor laws was perceived principally as a problem of rural areas; the metropolis had a different poor to contend with.

63 Such brief arguments do scant justice to the sophisticated case, backed up with ample statistics, made by Schwarz, London in the Age of Industrialization.

64 Luxury was not the sort of conspicuous consumption we now associate with the term. For Fielding, it referred to undesirable expenditure among the labouring poor on alcohol and gambling; for others, consumption of tea, sugar and white bread was considered a luxury.

65 George, London Life, pp. 27–33.


67 Donald F. Lach, Asia in the Making of Europe. Vol. I. The Century of Discovery, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1965; Asia in the Making of Europe. Vol. II. A Century of Wonder, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977; Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, Asia in the Making of Europe. Vol. III. A Century of Advance, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993. The original intent was to publish two books on each of the three centuries. Inevitably, the project expanded, as a result of which the 1500s attracted two, the 1600s three, and the 1700s four.


69 Margaret Hodgen, Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, see also my discussion of Hodgen in Chapter 4.


71 There remains doubt over the existence of Mandeville. Travels, first published in 1356, was a compilation of earlier travel writings – particularly those of Odoric and John de Carpini – which he infused with a vivid literary imagination. It was written for a popular audience, and was widely translated into a variety of European languages.


73 See my later discussion, p. 77.


75 Ram Chandra Prasad, Early English Travellers in India. A Study in the Travel Literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods with Particular Reference to India, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.


For an interesting discussion of this, with particular reference to the writings of Coriato and Roe, see Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues*, Chapter 1.


Ibid., p. 53.

Purchas included an abridged version of Withington’s narrative in his *Pilgrimes*; the complete text was later incorporated as an appendix to Anon., *A Journey over Land, from the Gulf of Honduras to the Great South Sea Performed by John Cockburn, and Five Other Englishmen*, etc., 1734, p. 315, cited in Prasad, *Early English Travellers*, p. 259.


See an interesting comparison between the two descriptions of the same part of the itinerary in ibid., pp. 39–42.

This trend was, of course, not confined to England. By the end of the seventeenth century most of the important travel literature was available in the major European languages.


Lach notes that the initial dominance over travel writings on India exercised by the Iberians was challenged by the Dutch after 1630, and by the French after 1680 (*Asia in the Making of Europe*. Vol. III, pp. 590–1). This is nicely illustrated by the popularity of individual publications. Using information on the numbers of editions, he suggests that among the most popular travel books of the seventeenth century were Le Maire and Schouten’s circumnavigation (1617) and Bontekoe’s *journael* (1646), both of which were published in thirty-eight editions. Compared with writings on the Far East, those on India do not feature that strongly. Only Bernier’s travels (1670–71) and Tavernier’s account (1676–77) are included among the best-sellers. No English books appear.


Ibid., pp. 52–3.

In their surveys of colonial narratives of India, Jyotsna Singh and A. Chatterjee include none from the first half of the eighteenth century. Their coverage is far from comprehensive, but that no travel account of India from this period is thought worth mentioning is significant (Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues*, and A. Chatterjee, *Representations of India*, 1740–1840. *The Creation of India in the Colonial Imagination*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998).


Ibid., pp. xii–xiii.

Ibid., p. xiv.

Ibid., p. 152.