

Table ronde / Roundtable 219

and Caroline London's streets had eyes and ears covering, if not controlling, those suspected of anti-social behaviour. What is different, as Griffiths makes clear, is the language contemporaries drew upon to characterize and compartmentalize those "miscreants" who displayed such qualities and conduct. *Lost Londons* illuminates the rich and vast vocabulary contemporaries used to describe and to define the poorer, meaner, humbler plebeian inhabitants of the city. As he argues in his conclusion, early modern Londoners knew "they also tried to capture crime in a cage of chosen words, confining shifty people inside labels" (p. 435).

Among the aforementioned themes of instability and the social order, policing and punishment, languages of identification and labelling, continuity and change, wealth and poverty, and alongside emerging mechanisms for surveillance, inquiry, and prosecution that, in part, inspired and invigorated institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and Bridewell that took shape between 1500 and 1660, we also hear in *Lost Londons* the discordant and disembodied voices of early modern Londoners calling out across the centuries. They provide us with a bewildering variety of images that would have been well understood, and all too well recognized, both by the anonymous sixteenth-century poet who wrote of London as "a sovereign citie" and by Percy Bysshe Shelley, who saw it as the early-nineteenth-century embodiment of Hell.

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"Sare . . . Ghamidh"

Perhaps surprisingly, this book starts with a single word. Perhaps equally surprisingly, most books do not. Most books begin with a story, perhaps a compressed but affecting tale of a single individual's tragic experience; or with an image, a word portrait of a single room to set the scene; or with a question, a beautifully crafted conundrum drawn from a lifetime of setting too many undergraduate essays; or with a mere statement of outrage, a recognition of the crackbrained foolishness of the academy and the many errors of its denizens — a preface to a quixotic foray into tilting at the windmills of historiography.

pp. 28–63; and, more generally, V. Groebner, *Who are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

Paul Griffiths' book, by contrast, starts with a word, and that word is "Sare." Of course, "Sare" is not just an everyday, over-a-cup-of-coffee sort of word; it is a word full of ambiguities. One could go many years without ever hearing it spoken, and most of us will go a lifetime without ever using it. The quotation with which *Lost Londons* begins is "The World is Sare Changed," and within this slight but telling linguistic wrapper "Sare" seems to mean "very," but could also mean severely or dangerously or, to have recourse to the gossamer protection of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "with much suffering," "grievously," or "against one's will."

The starting point for the journey taken by this book is a studied ambiguity that challenges the reader to pay attention to words; some 150,000 individual words later, and with equal disdain for convention, this book also ends with a word. By now, the subtle suggestion of ambiguity has become a stentorian claim to uncertainty. The word at the end is "Ghamidh," an Arabic word Anthony Shadid uses to mean "mysterious," "ambiguous," "unclear," or "uncertain" and that denotes a state of mind in which uncertainty is a sustainable intellectual perspective.¹⁴

Between this beginning and end is the story of Bridewell's archive, of the dead paper and parchment husk of that most verbose and loquacious of London's hospitals, itself the product of a prolix Protestantism seeped in civic humanism and dedicated to the furtherance of *the word*, which was in turn written into the stones of a prison and a workhouse. The story is familiar enough and tells of a new-found summary justice, at the disposal of competing civic elites; of old Catholic pride and new-found Protestant displeasure; of a court and a prison for the sexually incontinent and the simply troublesome, for the ne'er do well and the e'er do bad; of art masters and their wayward apprentices; of constables and beadles, marshals and watchmen.

In the process of telling this story Griffiths substantially revises important elements of it and of the history of London more broadly. In his hands, the much-lauded stability of sixteenth-century London becomes a lurching stumble through a landscape filled with fear and danger. An overwhelming rush of vagrants and vagabonds, of migrants and the simply unfamiliar, are depicted as challenging the sensitive souls of late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century Londoners — people still attached to old Stowe's London, with its warm beer and Catholic rituals, its landscapes of charity and community.

In its most revisionist mode, this book depicts London as an essentially successful city, coping effectively with a series of profound challenges. Constables and watchmen are raised up from the squalor of their ill-deserved historical reputation as placemen and fools to the more honourable status of detectives in waiting — Dogberry and Elbow are transformed into Dixons of Dock Green, if not quite into Morse and Grissom. Parishes and wards, the City and its companies, are

14 Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War* (New York: Picador, Macmillan, 2005), p. 10.

likewise rescued from the infinite condescension of early modernists and reinstated as efficient organizations manufacturing an archive of surveillance to help police the dark streets of a newly modern city.

Similarly, a criminal justice history that has traditionally emphasized the importance of individual victims in prosecuting crime, leading to a kind of scatter-gun justice that in turn produced the travesty of almost random judicial murder at Tyburn, is redrawn to include the sensible officers of a newly efficient set of old institutions. For Griffiths, these responsible servants and neighbourly men and women were concerned primarily to keep the streets clean and the traffic flowing, to gently restrain the enthusiasms of youth and the unwelcome strategies and makeshifts of the poor. The night is efficiently lit by candles and lamps made bright by civic pride. The kennels and lay stalls are made sweet by hard-working men, while good citizens slept, fearful, but essentially secure in their beds.

Some of this welcome revisionism is slightly overdrawn. In a bout of middle-aged cynicism, this reader could not help but doubt the evidence of the constable who claimed to be on the case, undercover, and only “feigning” drunkenness when he agreed to accompany Dorothy Morton to a private chamber at the Blue Boar Inn in Gutter Lane, late one night in December 1627, for the purposes of commercial sex (p. 392). Dorothy Morton later found herself under arrest and tried at Bridewell, the accusing constable claiming that they never got past the stairs. Griffiths deploys these events as evidence of constables’ sharp-eyed commitment to searching out criminal activity, but they could as easily be read as a simple argument between a punter and a prostitute, and as such to reflect the casual power of a male constable in a patriarchal society.

This sort of quibble apart, there can be no doubt that Griffiths has shifted the historiographical ground significantly and in a way that we should welcome. Early modern institutions did work, and most constables were constables. Record-keepers kept records, and nightsoilmen collected the night soil. While historians can sweat blood and tears over felony crime, as Griffiths details, the vast majority of everyday effort went on implementing what we might now describe as community policing and zero tolerance.¹⁵

Griffiths is also certainly right to reinsert and re-emphasize the impact of the problem of vagrancy in driving the evolution of the urban quotidian. A fear of vagrancy powered the evolution of London and its institutions in a way that neither war nor ideology could. These revisions do not form the most important or interesting facets of this book, however. They engage with a literature that has spent a century exploring the interstices of state formation. Thus we now

15 For examples of literature within the history of crime focused on felony prosecutions, see Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare's England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004); J. A. Sharpe, “Domestic Homicide in Early Modern England,” *Historical Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1981), pp. 29–48; Lawrence Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society 1300–1980,” *Past and Present*, vol. 101 (1983), pp. 22–33; M. Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

have studies on the weak state, strong state, European state, medieval state, Catholic state, Protestant state, police state, welfare state, surveillance state.¹⁶ Each has gone and come back again, and the explanatory power of this particular meta-narrative has largely run into the sands of contemporary post-nationalism. In the process, the importance of our arguments about how well past systems worked, how “modern” they were, and how efficient they were have to some extent lost their intellectual purchase.

Instead, the core and centre of this book lies not in its claims to a revised history of London, but in its literary practices. Like most historians, Griffiths moons, love-sick and romantic, after his archive. The physicality of the court books, the scratching intelligence of every line, is palpably present in these pages. With a whole cadre of fellow historians, Griffiths practises a certain romanticization of the archive and the historian’s journey into it. Where most historians, once there, are held captive, forced to play the role of the ventriloquist dummy for the archival clerk, seduced by the world view of their long-dead interlocutors, Griffiths escapes this fate. Where other historians use their archives to retell stories and lives that would be familiar to long-dead scribblers, Griffiths does not. Where others cut their archives into individual pieces of historical cloth, prior to sewing them back together in a patchwork of explanation, Griffiths unpicks every strand in an attempt to weave a fully new fabric.

What Griffiths has done is to refuse simply to repeat the stories found in the Court Books, and instead has reordered the text as a series of individual words and phrases. For Griffiths, each paragraph, each legal encounter, ceases to be a story that happened to a single individual and becomes instead a series of single words and phrases, literary artefacts ground to their smallest dimension. His substantial appendix provides statistical underpinnings for the changing use of individual words, but the overarching impression given is of a simple love affair with the grit of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century language.

A measure of this granularity, this balking at narrative, is that, through the course of almost 500 pages of text, there is not a single contemporary quote long enough to warrant a separate indented section. Instead, there are words: “A ‘whore’ ‘drew’ men ‘into lewd houses’ and took money when their guard was down. Mary Lewis, an ‘old’ Bridewell ‘customer,’ was arrested in Cheapside in 1631, ‘enticing a man to drinke with her’...” (p. 153). Words pile onto words in a cascade of text that is compelling and makes the point, more fully than any simple argument could, that, as Griffiths claims, “Bridewell ... became ... London’s label factory.”

16 The overwhelming emphasis on the evolution of the functioning of the state, as the basic concern of British history, is perhaps best exemplified in the history of poor relief, which consistently eschews an account of the experience of paupers in preference for a history of institutions and their officers. See, for example, Paul Slack, *From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

To put it another way, Griffiths uses a literary style that is essentially pointillist. Where others use broad strokes, Griffiths builds a picture word by word. In the process he escapes the narrative of his own archive and arguably the love traps set for historians among the dusty folios. This is a wonderful thing to have done. It is dramatically innovative and fresh. It makes this book something very different to which we need to pay attention. It is a facet of the experimental literary process in which historians need to participate. Academic history has gone well past its sell-by date, and, unless we are willing to reinvent it, we might as well call ourselves antiquarians and be done.

Each experiment has its own costs and raises its own questions, however. In this instance, the clear cost is to narrative itself. The creation of a story, disciplined by time, person, theme, or institution, is a hugely powerful thing that allows the historian to create something new in the reader's mind. It is impossible to lose yourself in passive prose analysis in quite the way you do when reading a story, and there are innumerable stories to be told in these records. In a discussion of how seventeenth-century clerks used the archive to know about people, Griffiths observes, "It did not take too long to piece together a biography from Bridewell's books, especially with handy name indexes lining one side of each page" (p. 426). Nevertheless, he chooses to build not a single biography, of either a vagrant or a constable. Even the institutional biography is left largely untold, leaving in its stead a wild swim in a sea of words, at the end of which the reader knows the water, its temperature and its saltiness, but is still ignorant of its tides and currents, its sharks and fish — its bottom.

This pointillist literary style also tends to de-emphasize perspective and conflict. The object of study becomes the "label" or the process of imposing a label rather than the experience of being labelled. The word "Vagrant," for instance, is used throughout the Bridewell books and is the key word in this text, but no individuals ever described themselves as "vagrants." People are travelling, or selling, or just trying to get from A to B. The process of being labelled a "vagrant" is a violent act perpetrated by smug authority on a weak individual. In this instance, the labelling process is a form of assault. By emphasizing the word at the expense of the narratives of those being rebranded as vagrants, however, Griffiths renders it impossible to re-imagine their experience. Most historians have substantially more faith in the power of narrative than does Paul Griffiths, and they justifiably fear that to abandon it entirely would be fundamentally to disempower history as a genre. But the pointillism of this book, its overwhelming emphasis on words, forms a vital strategic intervention in history writing to which we as readers and writers need to pay mind.

Having ground Bridewell's many stories into their individual words, however, we need to reinvest them with a relationship to one another; we need to see Bridewell not as a "factory of labels" as Griffiths does, with its nineteenth- and twentieth-century denotation of a system and a product, but as a seventeenth-century "factory of labels" — a trading compound where one thing is exchanged for another, where value and meaning are created by the simple process of shifting goods from outside to in, from one place to another. This book challenges us to

rethink our relationship to narrative and text, to live with the ambiguities of text, and to pay attention to its textures. This book is “Sare . . . Ghamidh” and all the more important for being so.

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Losing Bridewell in *Lost Londons*

Paul Griffiths has very deliberately not written a book about Bridewell, for his ambition is much higher. This is a major contribution to discussions about early modern crime, policing, and the challenges of metropolitan growth. However, it remains overwhelmingly based on the records of Bridewell, and some of the absences in the treatment of the hospital are therefore disappointing. The discussion of trial processes comes in the middle of the book, and when the reader gets there, the account is limited. There is little on who the governors actually were or the role of the treasurer and the clerk; the charter is discussed mainly in terms of challenges to it, and it is difficult to find a sustained discussion of what it actually said. What was the basis on which the governors acted? We find hardly anything about the hospital’s precarious finances; its staffing structure has to be inferred from scattered references, usually to the staff’s failings. There is only cursory reference to its use as a holding place for political prisoners (because they tend not to appear in the court books); yet Robert Southwell described Bridewell in 1591 as “the common purgatory of priests and Catholics.”¹⁷ Most curiously, there is hardly anything on the vicissitudes of the various efforts to provide work, whether for those being punished there or for those orphans supposedly in training under the so-called “artmasters.”

Do these lacunae matter? In light of Griffiths’ preoccupation with crime, perhaps some matter less than others. It is helpful, however, to be reminded of Bridewell’s mixed character as both a penal institution and as a house of occupations, because that element in its contested status in the city’s welfare provision is one that Griffiths rightly emphasizes. Money always matters, so we do need to know about the resource constraints, and personalities matter too, so one would expect more profiling of the governors. In the mid-1570s the activists on the court were a minority, and one with a decidedly godly tinge; I claim this explains

17 P. Caraman, ed., *The Other Face: Catholic Life under Elizabeth I* (London: Longman, 1960), pp. 86–87.